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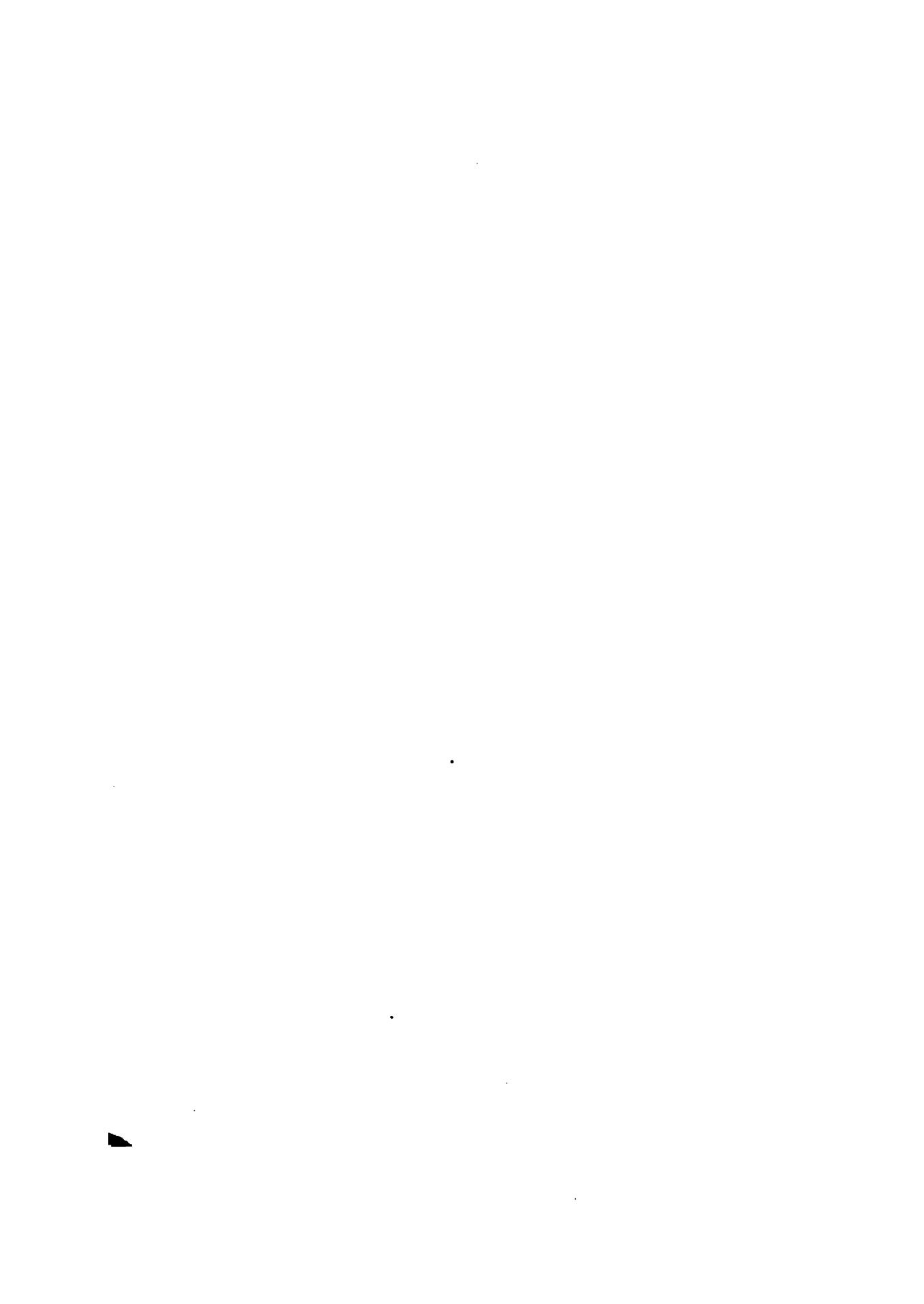
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ENGLISH LITERATURE  
BY  
H. A. TAINÉ, D. C. L.

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One of the Masters at the Edinburgh Academy

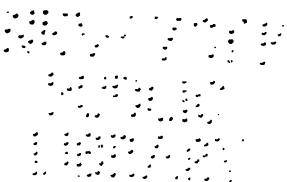
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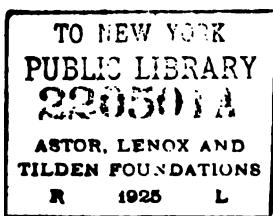
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## CHAPTER VI.

*Milton.*

ON the borders of the licentious Renaissance which was drawing to a close, and of the exact school of poetry which was springing up, between the monotonous conceits of Cowley and the correct gallantries of Waller, appeared a mighty and superb mind, prepared by logic and enthusiasm for eloquence and the epic style; liberal, Protestant, a moralist and a poet, adorning the cause of Algernon Sidney and Locke with the inspiration of Spenser and Shakspeare; the heir of a poetical age, the precursor of an austere age, holding his place between the epoch of unselfish dreaming and the epoch of practical action; like his own Adam, who, taking his way to an unfriendly land, heard behind him, in the closed Eden, the dying strains of heaven.

John Milton was not one of those fevered souls void of self-command, whose rapture takes them by fits, whom a sickly sensibility drives for ever to the extreme of sorrow or joy, whose pliability prepares them to produce a variety of characters, whose inquietude condemns them to paint the madness and contradictions of passion. Vast knowledge, close logic, and grand passion; these were his marks. His mind was lucid, his imagination limited. He was incapable of “bating one jot of heart or hope,” or of being transformed. He conceived the

loftiest of ideal beauties, but he conceived only one. He was not born for the drama, but for the ode. He does not create souls, but constructs arguments, and experiences emotions. Emotions and arguments, all the forces and actions of his soul, assemble and are arranged beneath a unique sentiment, that of the sublime; and the broad river of lyric poetry streams from him, impetuous, with even flow, splendid as a cloth of gold.

### I.

This dominant sense constituted the greatness and the firmness of his character. Against external fluctuations he found a refuge in himself; and the ideal city which he had built in his soul, endured impregnable to all assaults. It is too beautiful, this inner city, for him to wish to leave it; it was too solid to be destroyed. He believed in the sublime with the whole force of his nature, and the whole authority of his logic; and with him, cultivated reason strengthened by its tests the suggestions of primitive instinct. With this double armour, man can advance firmly through life. He who is always feeding himself with demonstrations is capable of believing, willing, persevering in belief and will; he does not change with every event and every passion, as that fickle and pliable being whom we call a poet; he remains at rest in fixed principles. He is capable of embracing a cause, and of continuing attached to it, whatever may happen, spite of all, to the end. No seduction, no emotion, no accident, no change alters the stability of his conviction or the lucidity of his knowledge. On the first day, on the last day, during the whole time, he preserves intact the entire system of

his clear ideas, and the logical vigour of his brain sustains the manly vigour of his heart. When at length, as here, this close logic is employed in the service of noble ideas, enthusiasm is added to constancy. The man holds his opinions not only as true, but as sacred. He fights for them, not only as a soldier, but as a priest. He is impassioned, devoted, religious, heroic. Rarely is such a mixture seen; but it was fully seen in Milton.

He was of a family in which courage, moral nobility, the love of art, were present to whisper the most beautiful and eloquent words around his cradle. His mother was a most exemplary woman, well known through all the neighbourhood for her benevolence.<sup>1</sup> His father, a student of Christ Church, and disinherited as a Protestant, had made his fortune by his own energies, and, amidst his occupations as a scrivener or writer, had preserved the taste for letters, being unwilling to give up "his liberal and intelligent tastes to the extent of becoming altogether a slave to the world;" he wrote verses, was an excellent musician, one of the best composers of his time; he chose Cornelius Jansen to paint his son's portrait when in his tenth year, and gave his child the widest and fullest literary education.<sup>2</sup> Let the reader try to picture this child, in the street (Bread Street) inhabited by merchants, in this citizen-like and scholarly, religious and poetical family, whose manners were regular and their aspirations lofty, where they set the psalms to music, and wrote madrigals in

<sup>1</sup> Matre probatissimâ et eleemosynis per viciniam potissimum nota.—*Defensio Secunda. Life of Milton*, by Keightley.

<sup>2</sup> "My father destined me while yet a little child for the study of humane letters."—*Life*, by Masson, 1869, i. 51.

honour of Oriana the queen,<sup>1</sup> where vocal music, letters, painting, all the adornments of the beautiful Renaissance, decked the sustained gravity, the hard-working honesty, the deep Christianity of the Reformation. All Milton's genius springs from this; he carried the splendour of the Renaissance into the earnestness of the Reformation, the magnificence of Spenser into the severity of Calvin, and, with his family, found himself at the confluence of the two civilisations which he combined. Before he was ten years old he had a learned tutor, "a puritan, who cut his hair short;" after that he went to Saint Paul's school, then to the University of Cambridge, that he might be instructed in "polite literature;" and at the age of twelve he worked, in spite of his weak eyes and headaches, until midnight and even later. His John the Baptist, a character resembling himself, says:

" When I was yet a child, no childish play  
To me was pleasing; all my mind was set  
Serious to learn and know, and thence to do,  
What might be public good; myself I thought  
Born to that end, born to promote all truth,  
All righteous things."<sup>2</sup>

At school, afterwards at Cambridge, then with his father, he was strengthening and preparing himself with all his power, free from all blame, and loved by all good men; traversing the vast fields of Greek and Latin literature, not only the great writers, but all the writers, down to the half of the middle-age; and studying simultaneously ancient Hebrew, Syriac and rabbinical He-

<sup>1</sup> Queen Elizabeth.

<sup>2</sup> *The Poetical Works of John Milton*, ed. Mitford, *Paradise Regained*, Book i. l. 201-206.

brew, French and Spanish, old English literature, all the Italian literature, with such zeal and profit that he wrote Italian and Latin verse and prose like an Italian or a Roman ; in addition to this, music, mathematics, theology, and much besides. A serious thought regulated this great toil. “The church, to whose service, by the intentions of my parents and friends, I was destined of a child, and in mine own resolutions : till coming to some maturity of years, and perceiving what tyranny had invaded the church, that he who would take orders must subscribe slave, and take an oath withal, which unless he took with a conscience that would retch, he must either straight perjure, or split his faith ; I thought it better to prefer a blameless silence before the sacred office of speaking bought, and begun with servitude and forswearing.”<sup>1</sup>

He refused to be a clergyman from the same feelings that he had wished it ; the desire and the renunciation all sprang from the same source—a fixed resolve to act nobly. Falling back into the life of a layman, he continued to cultivate and perfect himself, studying passionately and with method, but without pedantry or rigour : nay, rather, after his master Spenser, in *L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, Comus*, he set forth in sparkling and variegated dress the wealth of mythology, nature, and fancy ; then, sailing for the land of science and beauty, he visited Italy, made the acquaintance of Grotius and Galileo, sought the society of the learned, the men of letters, the men of the world, listened to the musicians, steeped himself in all the beauties stored up by the Renaissance at Florence and Rome.

<sup>1</sup> Milton's *Prose Works*, ed. Mitford, 8 vols., *The Reason of Church Government*, i. 150.

Everywhere his learning, his fine Italian and Latin style, secured him the friendship and attentions of scholars, so that, on his return to Florence, he "was as well received as if he had returned to his native country." He collected books and music, which he sent to England, and thought of traversing Sicily and Greece, those two homes of ancient letters and arts. Of all the flowers that opened to the Southern sun under the influence of the two great Paganisms, he gathered freely the balmiest and the most exquisite, but without staining himself with the mud which surrounded them. "I call the Deity to witness," he wrote later, "that in all those places in which vice meets with so little discouragement, and is practised with so little shame, I never once deviated from the paths of integrity and virtue, and perpetually reflected that, though my conduct might escape the notice of men, it could not elude the inspection of God."<sup>1</sup>

Amid the licentious gallantries and inane sonnets like those which the Cisisbei and Academicians lavished forth, he retained his sublime idea of poetry: he thought to choose a heroic subject from ancient English history; and as he says, "I was confirmed in this opinion, that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem; that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men, or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that which is praise-

<sup>1</sup> Milton's *Prose Works* (Bohn's edition, 1848), *Second Defence of the People of England*, i. 257. See also his *Italian Sonnets*, with their religious sentiment.

worthy."<sup>1</sup> Above all, he loved Dante and Petrarch for their purity, telling himself that "if unchastity in a woman, whom St. Paul terms the glory of man, be such a scandal and dishonour, then certainly in a man, who is both the image and glory of God, it must, though commonly not so thought, be much more deflouring and dishonourable."<sup>2</sup> He thought "that every free and gentle spirit, without that oath, ought to be born a knight," for the practice and defence of chastity, and he kept himself virgin till his marriage. Whatever the temptation might be, whatever the attraction or fear, it found him equally opposed and equally firm. From a sense of gravity and propriety he avoided all religious disputes; but if his own creed were attacked, he defended it "without any reserve or fear," even in Rome, before the Jesuits who plotted against him, within a few paces of the Inquisition and the Vatican. Perilous duty, instead of driving him away, attracted him. When the Revolution began to threaten, he returned, drawn by conscience, as a soldier who hastens to danger when he hears the clash of arms, convinced, as he himself tells us, that it was a shame to him leisurely to spend his life abroad, and for his own pleasure, whilst his fellow-countrymen were striving for their liberty. In battle he appeared in the front ranks as a volunteer, courting danger everywhere. Throughout his education and throughout his youth, in his profane readings and his sacred studies, in his acts and his maxims, already a ruling and permanent thought grew manifest—the resolution to develop and unfold within him the ideal man.

<sup>1</sup> Milton's *Prose Works*, Mitford, *Apology for Smectymnuus*, i. 270.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 273. See also his *Treatise on Divorce*, which shows clearly Milton's meaning.

## II.

Two powers chiefly lead mankind—impulse and idea: the one influencing sensitive, unfettered, poetical souls, capable of transformations, like Shakspeare; the other governing active, combative, heroic souls, capable of immutability, like Milton. The first are sympathetic and effusive; the second are concentrative and reserved.<sup>1</sup> The first give themselves up, the others withhold themselves. These, by reliance and sociability, with an artistic instinct and a sudden imitative comprehension, involuntarily take the tone and disposition of the men and things which surround them, and an immediate counterpoise is effected between the inner and the outer man. Those, by mistrust and rigidity, with a combative instinct and a quick reference to rule, become naturally thrown back upon themselves, and in their narrow limits no longer feel the solicitations and contradictions of their surroundings. They have formed a model, and thenceforth this model like a watchword restrains or urges them on. Like all powers destined to have sway, the inner idea grows and absorbs to its use the rest of their being. They bury it in themselves by meditation, they nourish it with reasoning, they put it in communication with the chain of all their doctrines and all their experiences; so that when a temptation assails them, it is not an isolated principle which it attacks, but it encounters

<sup>1</sup> "Though Christianity had been but slightly taught me, yet a certain reservedness of natural disposition and moral discipline, learnt out of the noblest philosophy, was enough to keep me in disdain of far less incontinences than this of the bordello."—*Apology for Smectymnuus*, Mitford, i. 272.

the whole combination of their belief, an infinitely ramified combination, too strong for a sensuous seduction to tear asunder. At the same time a man by habit is upon his guard; the combative attitude is natural to him, and he stands erect, firm in the pride of his courage and the inveteracy of his determination.

A soul thus fortified is like a diver in his bell;<sup>1</sup> it passes through life as he passes through the sea, unstained but isolated. On his return to England, Milton fell back among his books, and received a few pupils, upon whom he imposed, as upon himself, continuous toil, serious reading, a frugal diet, a strict behaviour; the life of a recluse, almost of a monk. Suddenly, in a month, after a country visit, he married.<sup>2</sup> A few weeks afterwards, his wife returned to her father's house, would not come back to him, took no notice of his letters, and sent back his messenger with scorn. The two characters had come into collision. Nothing displease women more than an austere and self-contained character. They see that they have no hold upon it; its dignity awes them, its pride repels, its preoccupations keep them aloof; they feel themselves of less value, neglected for general interests or speculative curiosities; judged, moreover, and that after an inflexible rule; at most regarded with condescension, as a sort of less reasonable and inferior beings, debarred from the equality which they demand, and the love which alone can reward them for the loss of equality. The "priest" character is made for solitude; the tact, ease, charm, pleasantness, and gentleness necessary to

<sup>1</sup> An expression of Jean Paul Richter. See an excellent article on Milton in the *Nat. Review*, July 1859.

<sup>2</sup> 1643, at the age of 35.

all companionship, is wanting to it; we admire him, but we go no further, especially if, like Milton's wife, we are somewhat dull and commonplace,<sup>1</sup> adding mediocrity of intellect to the repugnance of our hearts. He had, so his biographers say, a certain gravity of nature, or severity of mind which would not condescend to petty things, but kept him in the clouds, in a region which is not that of the household. He was accused of being harsh, choleric; and certainly he stood upon his manly dignity, his authority as a husband, and was not so greatly esteemed, respected, studied, as he thought he deserved to be. In short, he passed the day amongst his books, and the rest of the time his heart lived in an abstracted and sublime world of which few wives catch a glimpse, his wife least of all. He had, in fact, chosen like a student, so much the more at random because his former life had been of "a well-governed and wise appetite." Equally like a man of the closet, he resented her flight, being the more irritated because the world's ways were unknown to him. Without dread of ridicule, and with the sternness of a speculative man suddenly brought into collision with actual life, he wrote treatises on *Divorce*, signed them with his name, dedicated them to Parliament, held himself divorced *de facto*, because his wife refused to return, *de jure* because he had four texts of Scripture for it;

<sup>1</sup> *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, Mitford, ii. 27, 29, 32. "Mute and spiritless mate." "The bashful muteness of the virgin may often-times hide all the unliveliness and natural sloth which is really unfit for conversation." "A man shall find himself bound fast to an image of earth and phlegm, with whom he looked to be the copartner of a sweet and gladsome society." A pretty woman will say in reply: I cannot love a man who carries his head like the Sacrament.

whereupon he paid court to another young lady, and suddenly, seeing his wife on her knees and weeping, forgave her, took her back, renewed the dry and sad marriage-tie, not profiting by experience, but on the other hand fated to contract two other unions, the last with a wife thirty years younger than himself. Other parts of his domestic life were neither better managed nor happier. He had taken his daughters for secretaries, and made them read languages which they did not understand,—a repelling task, of which they bitterly complained. In return, he accused them of being “undutiful and unkind,” of neglecting him, not caring whether they left him alone, of conspiring with the servants to rob him in their purchases, of stealing his books, so that they would have disposed of the whole of them. Mary, the second, hearing one day that he was going to be married, said that his marriage was no news ; the best news would be his death. An incredible speech, and one which throws a strange light on the miseries of this family. Neither circumstances nor nature had created him for happiness.

### III.

They had created him for strife, and after his return to England he had thrown himself heartily into it, armed with logic, anger, and learning, protected by conviction and conscience. When “the liberty of speech was no longer subject to control, all mouths began to be opened against the bishops. . . . I saw that a way was opening for the establishment of real liberty ; that the foundation was laying for the deliverance of man from the yoke of slavery and superstition ; . . . and as I had from my youth studied the distinction between religious

and civil rights, . . . I determined to relinquish the other pursuits in which I was engaged, and to transfer the whole force of my talents and my industry to this one important object.”<sup>1</sup> And thereupon he wrote his *Reformation in England*, jeering at and attacking with haughtiness and scorn the prelacy and its defenders. Refuted and attacked in turn, he became still more bitter, and crushed those whom he had beaten.<sup>2</sup> Transported to the limits of his creed, and like a knight making a rush, and who pierces with a dash the whole line of battle, he hurled himself upon the prince, wrote that the abolition of royalty as well as the overthrow of Episcopacy were necessary; and one month after the death of Charles I., justified his execution, replied to the *Eikon Basilike*, then to Salmasius’ *Defence of the King*, with incomparable breadth of style and scorn, like a soldier, like an apostle, like a man who everywhere feels the superiority of his science and logic, who wishes to make it felt, who proudly tramples upon and crushes his adversaries as ignoramuses, inferior minds, base hearts.<sup>3</sup> “Kings most commonly,” he says, at the beginning of the *Eikonoklastes*, “though strong in legions, are but weak at arguments; as they who ever have accustomed from their cradle to use their will only as their right hand, their reason always as their left. Whence unexpectedly constrained to that kind of com-

<sup>1</sup> *Second Defence of the People of England*, Prose Works (Bohn), i. 257.

<sup>2</sup> *Of Reformation touching Church Discipline in England, and the Causes that hitherto have hindered it. Of Prelatical Episcopacy. The Reason of Church Government urged against Prelacy*: 1641. *Apology for Smectymnus*: 1642.

<sup>3</sup> *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates. Eikonoklastes*: 1648-9. *Defensio Populi Anglicani*: 1651. *Defensio Secunda*: 1654. *Authoris pro se defensio. Responso*: 1655.

bat, they prove but weak and puny adversaries.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, for love of those who suffer themselves to be overcome by this dazzling name of royalty, he consents to “take up King Charles’s gauntlet,” and bangs him with it in a style calculated to make the imprudent men who had thrown it down repent. Far from recoiling at the accusation of murder, he accepts and boasts of it. He vaunts the regicide, sets it on a triumphal car, decks it in all the light of heaven. He relates with the tone of a judge, “how a most potent king, after he had trampled upon the laws of the nation, and given a shock to its religion, and began to rule at his own will and pleasure, was at last subdued in the field by his own subjects, who had undergone a long slavery under him; how afterwards he was cast into prison, and when he gave no ground, either by words or actions, to hope better things of him, was finally by the supreme council of the kingdom condemned to die, and beheaded before the very gates of the royal palace. . . . For what king’s majesty sitting upon an exalted throne, ever shone so brightly, as that of the people of England then did, when, shaking off that old superstition, which had prevailed a long time, they gave judgment upon the king himself, or rather upon an enemy who had been their king, caught as it were in a net by his own laws (who alone of all mortals challenged to himself impunity by a divine right), and scrupled not to inflict the same punishment upon him, being guilty, which he would have inflicted upon any other?”<sup>2</sup> After having justified the execution, he sanctified it; consecrated it by decrees of heaven after he had authorised it by the laws

<sup>1</sup> Milton’s *Prose Works*, Mitford, vol. i. 329.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Preface to the *Defence of the People of England*, vi. pp. 1, 2.

of the world ; from the support of Law he transferred it to the support of God. This is the God who “uses to throw down proud and unruly kings, . . . and utterly to extirpate them and all their family. By his manifest impulse being set on work to recover our almost lost liberty, following him as our guide, and adoring the impresses of his divine power manifested upon all occasions, we went on in no obscure but an illustrious passage, pointed out and made plain to us by God himself.”<sup>1</sup> Here the reasoning ends with a song of triumph, and enthusiasm breaks out through the mail of the warrior. Such he displayed himself in all his actions and in all his doctrines. The solid files of bristling and well-ordered arguments which he disposed in battle-array were changed in his heart in the moment of triumph into glorious processions of crowned and resplendent hymns. He was transported by them, he de-

<sup>1</sup> Mitford, vi. pp. 2-3. This “Defence” was in Latin. Milton ends it thus :—

“ He (God) has gloriously delivered you, the first of nations, from the two greatest mischiefs of this life, and most pernicious to virtue, tyranny and superstition ; he has endued you with greatness of mind to be the first of mankind, who after having conquered their own king, and having had him delivered into their hands, have not scrupled to condemn him judicially, and, pursuant to that sentence of condemnation, to put him to death. After the performing so glorious an action as this, you ought to do nothing that is mean and little, not so much as to think of, much less to do, anything but what is great and sublime. Which to attain to, this is your only way ; as you have subdued your enemies in the field, so to make appear, that unarmed, and in the highest outward peace and tranquillity, you of all mankind are best able to subdue ambition, avarice, the love of riches, and can best avoid the corruptions that prosperity is apt to introduce (which generally subdues and triumph over other nations), to show as great justice, temperance, and moderation in the maintaining your liberty, as you have shown courage in freeing yourselves from slavery.”—*Ibid.* vol. vi. 251-2.

luded himself, and lived thus alone with the sublime, like a warrior-pontiff, who in his stiff armour, or his glittering stole, stands face to face with truth. Thus absorbed in strife and in his priesthood, he lived out of the world, as blind to palpable facts as he was protected against the seductions of the senses, placed above the stains and the lessons of experience, as incapable of leading men as of yielding to them. There was nothing in him akin to the devices and delays of the statesman, the crafty schemer, who pauses on his way, experimentalises, with eyes fixed on what may turn up, who gauges what is possible, and employs logic for practical purposes. Milton was speculative and chimerical. Locked up in his own ideas, he sees but them, is attracted but by them. Is he pleading against the bishops? He would extirpate them at once, without hesitation; he demands that the Presbyterian worship shall be at once established, without forethought, contrivance, hesitation. It is the command of God, it is the duty of the faithful; beware how you trifle with God or temporise with faith. Concord, gentleness, liberty, piety, he sees a whole swarm of virtues issue from this new worship. Let the king fear nothing from it, his power will be all the stronger. Twenty thousand democratic assemblies will take care that his rights be not infringed. These ideas make us smile. We recognise the party-man, who, on the verge of the Restoration, when "the whole multitude was mad with desire for a king," published *A Ready and Easy Way to establish a Free Commonwealth*, and described his method at length. We recognise the theorist who, to obtain a law of divorce, only appealed to Scripture, and aimed at transforming the civil constitution of a people by changing

the accepted sense of a verse. With closed eyes, sacred text in hand, he advances from consequence to consequence, trampling upon the prejudices, inclinations, habits, wants of men, as if a reasoning or religious spirit were the whole man, as if evidence always created belief, as if belief always resulted in practice, as if, in the struggle of doctrines, truth or justice gave doctrines the victory and sovereignty. To cap all, he sketched out a treatise on education, in which he proposed to teach each pupil every science, every art, and, what is more, every virtue. "He who had the art and proper eloquence . . . might in a short space gain them to an incredible diligence and courage, . . . infusing into their young breasts such an ingenuous and noble ardour as would not fail to make many of them renowned and matchless men."<sup>1</sup> Milton had taught for many years and at various times. A man must be insensible to experience or doomed to illusions who retains such deceptions after such experiences.

But his obstinacy constituted his power, and the inner constitution, which closed his mind to instruction, armed his heart against weaknesses. With men generally, the source of devotion dries up when in contact with life. Gradually, by dint of frequenting the world, we acquire its tone. We do not choose to be dupes, and to abstain from the license which others allow themselves; we relax our youthful strictness; we even smile, attributing it to our heated blood; we know our own motives, and cease to find ourselves sublime. We end by taking it calmly, and we see the world wag, only trying to avoid shocks, picking up here and there a few little comfortable

<sup>1</sup> *Of Education.* Mitford, ii. 385.

pleasures. Not so Milton. He lived complete and pure to the end, without loss of heart or weakness; experience could not instruct nor misfortune depress him; he endured all, and repented of nothing. He lost his sight, by his own fault, by writing, though ill, and against the prohibition of his doctors, to justify the English people against the invectives of Salmasius. He saw the funeral of the Republic, the proscription of his doctrines, the defamation of his honour. Around him ran riot, a distaste for liberty, an enthusiasm for slavery. A whole people threw itself at the feet of a young incapable and treacherous libertine. The glorious leaders of the Puritan faith were condemned, executed, cut down alive from the gallows, quartered amidst insults; others, whom death had saved from the hangman, were dug up and exposed on the gibbet; others, exiles in foreign lands, lived, threatened and attacked by royalist bullies; others again, more unfortunate, had sold their cause for money and titles, and sat amid the executioners of their former friends. The most pious and austere citizens of England filled the prisons, or wandered about in poverty and shame; and gross vice, impudently seated on the throne, rallied around it a herd of unbridled lusts and sensualities. Milton himself had been constrained to hide; his books had been burned by the hand of the hangman; even after the general act of indemnity he was imprisoned; when set at liberty, he lived in the expectation of being assassinated, for private fanaticism might seize the weapon relinquished by public revenge. Other smaller misfortunes came to aggravate by their stings the great wounds which afflicted him. Confiscations, a bankruptcy, finally, the great fire of London, had robbed him of three-

fourths of his fortune;<sup>1</sup> his daughters neither esteemed nor respected him; he sold his books, knowing that his family could not profit by them after his death; and amidst so many private and public miseries, he continued calm. Instead of repudiating what he had done, he gloried in it: instead of being cast down, he increased in firmness. He says, in his 22d sonnet:

“ Cyriack, this three years day these eyes, though clear,  
To outward view, of blemish or of spot,  
Bereft of sight, their seeing have forgot ;  
Nor to their idle orbs doth day appear  
Of sun, or moon, or star, throughout the year,  
Or man, or woman. Yet I argue not  
Against Heaven’s hand or will, nor bate one jot  
Of heart or hope ; but still bear up and steer  
Right onward. What supports me, dost thou ask ?  
The conscience, friend, to have lost them overplied  
In liberty’s defence, my noble task ;  
Of which all Europe rings from side to side.  
This thought might lead me through the world’s vain mask  
Content though blind, had I no other guide.”<sup>2</sup>

That thought was indeed his guide; he was “armed in himself,” and that “breastplate of diamond”<sup>3</sup> which had protected him in his prime against the wounds in battle, protected him in his old age against the temptations and doubts of defeat and adversity.

<sup>1</sup> A scrivener caused him to lose £2000. At the Restoration he was refused payment of £2000 which he had put into the Excise Office, and deprived of an estate of £50 a year, bought by him from the property of the Chapter of Westminster. His house in Bread Street was burnt in the great fire. When he died he is said to have left about £1500 in money (equivalent to about £5000 now), besides household goods. [I am indebted to the kindness of Professor Masson for the collation of this note.—Tr.]

<sup>2</sup> Milton’s *Poetical Works*, Mitford, i. *Sonnet xxii.*   <sup>3</sup> *Italian Sonnets.*

## IV.

Milton lived in a small house in London, or in the country, at Horton, in Buckinghamshire, published his *History of Britain*, his *Logic*, a *Treatise on True Religion and Heresy*, meditated his great *Treatise on Christian Doctrine*. Of all consolations, work is the most fortifying and the most healthy, because it solaces a man not by bringing him ease, but by requiring him to exert himself. Every morning he had a chapter of the Bible read to him in Hebrew, and remained for some time in silence, grave, in order to meditate on what he had heard. He never went to a place of worship. Independent in religion as in all else, he was sufficient to himself ; finding in no sect the marks of the true church, he prayed to God alone, without needing others' help. He studied till mid-day ; then, after an hour's exercise, he played the organ or the bass-violin. Then he resumed his studies till six, and in the evening enjoyed the society of his friends. When any one came to visit him, he was usually found in a room hung with old green hangings, seated in an arm-chair, and dressed neatly in black ; his complexion was pale, says one of his visitors, but not sallow ; his hands and feet were gouty ; his hair, of a light brown, was parted in the midst and fell in long curls ; his eyes, grey and clear, showed no sign of blindness. He had been very beautiful in his youth, and his English cheeks, once delicate as a young girl's, retained their colour almost to the end. His face, we are told, was pleasing ; his straight and manly gait bore witness to intrepidity and courage. Something great and proud breathes out yet from all his portraits ; and certainly few men have

done so much honour to their kind. Thus went out this noble life, like a setting sun, bright and calm. Amid so many trials, a pure and lofty joy, altogether worthy of him, had been granted to him: the poet, buried under the Puritan, had reappeared, more sublime than ever, to give to Christianity its second Homer. The dazzling dreams of his youth and the reminiscences of his ripe age were found in him, side by side with Calvinistic dogmas and the visions of Saint John, to create the Protestant epic of damnation and grace; and the vastness of primitive horizons, the flames of the infernal dungeon, the splendours of the celestial court, opened to the inner eye of the soul unknown regions beyond the sights which the eyes of the flesh had lost.

## V.

I have before me the formidable volume in which, some time after Milton's death, his prose works were collected.<sup>1</sup> What a book! The chairs creak when you place it upon them, and a man who had turned its leaves over for an hour, would have less pain in his head than in his arm. As the book, so were the men; from the mere outsides we might gather some notion of the controversialists and theologians whose doctrines they contain. Yet we must conclude that the author was eminently learned, elegant, travelled, philosophic, and a man of the world for his age. We think invol-

<sup>1</sup> 3 vols. folio, 1697-8. The titles of Milton's chief writings in prose are these:—*Of Reformation in England*; *The Reason of Church Government urged against Prelacy*; *Animadversions upon the Remonstrants' Defence*; *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*; *Tetrachordon*; *Tractate on Education*; *Areopagitica*; *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*; *Eikonoklastes*; *History of Britain*; *Defence of the People of England*.

untarily of the portraits of the theologians of those days, severe faces engraved on metal by the hard artists' tool, whose square brows and steady eyes stand out in startling prominence against a dark oak panel. We compare them to modern countenances, in which the delicate and complex features seem to quiver at the varied contact of hardly begun sensations and innumerable ideas. We try to imagine the heavy classical education, the physical exercises, the rude treatment, the rare ideas, the imposed dogmas, which formerly occupied, oppressed, fortified, and hardened the young; and we might fancy ourselves looking at an anatomy of megatheria and mastodons, reconstructed by Cuvier.

The race of living men is changed. Our mind fails us now-a-days at the idea of this greatness and this barbarism; but we discover that the barbarism was then the cause of the greatness. As in other times we might have seen, in the primitive slime and among the colossal ferns, ponderous monsters slowly wind their scaly backs, and tear the flesh from one another's sides with their misshapen talons; so now, at a distance, from the height of our calm civilisation, we see the battles of the theologians, who, armed with syllogisms, bristling with texts, covered one another with filth, and laboured to devour each other.

Milton fought in the front rank, pre-ordained to barbarism and greatness by his individual nature and the manners of the time, capable of displaying in high prominence the logic, style, and spirit of his age. It is drawing-room life which trims men into shape: the society of ladies, the lack of serious interests, idleness, vanity, security, are needed to bring men to elegance, urbanity, fine and light humour, to teach the desire to please, the fear to become wearisome, a perfect clearness,

a finished precision, the art of gradual transitions and delicate tact, a taste for suitable images, continual ease, and choice diversity. Seek nothing like this in Milton. The old scholastic system was not far off; it still weighed on those who were destroying it. Under this secular armour discussion proceeded pedantically, with measured steps. The first thing was to propound a thesis; and Milton writes, in large characters, at the head of his *Treatise on Divorce*, "that indisposition, unfitness, or contrariety of mind, arising from a cause in nature unchangeable, hindering, and ever likely to hinder the main benefits of conjugal society, which are solace and peace, is a greater reason of divorce than natural frigidity, especially if there be no children, and that there be mutual consent." And then follow, legion after legion, the disciplined army of the arguments. Battalion after battalion they pass by, numbered very distinctly. There is a dozen of them together, each with its title in clear characters, and the little brigade of subdivisions which it commands. Sacred texts hold the post of honour. Every word of them is discussed, the substantive after the adjective, the verb after the substantive, the preposition after the verb; interpretations, authorities, illustrations, are summoned up, and ranged between palisades of new divisions. And yet there is a lack of order, the question is not reduced to a single idea; we cannot see our way; proofs succeed proofs without logical sequence; we are rather tired out than convinced. We remember that the author speaks to Oxford men, lay or cleric, trained in pretended discussions, capable of obstinate attention, accustomed to digest indigestible books. They are at home in this thorny thicket of scholastic brambles; they beat a path

through, somewhat at hazard, hardened against the hurts which repulse us, and not having the smallest idea of the daylight which we require everywhere now.

With such ponderous reasoners, you must not look for wit. Wit is the nimbleness of victorious reason ; here, because everything is powerful, all is heavy. When Milton wishes to joke, he looks like one of Cromwell's pikemen, who, entering a room to dance, should fall upon the floor, and that with the extra weight of his armour. Few things could be more stupid than his *Animadversions upon the Remonstrants' Defence*. At the end of an argument his adversary concludes with this specimen of theological wit : "In the meanwhile see, brethren, how you have with Simon fished all night, and caught nothing." And Milton boastfully replies : "If we, fishing with Simon the apostle, can catch nothing; see what you can catch with Simon Magus; for all his hooks and fishing implements he bequeathed among you." Here a great savage laugh would break out. The spectators saw a charm in this way of insinuating that his adversary was simoniacal. A little before, the latter says : "Tell me, is this liturgy good or evil ?" Answer : "It is evil : repair the acheloian horn of your dilemma, how you can, against the next push." The doctors wondered at the fine mythological simile, and rejoiced to see the adversary so neatly compared to an ox, a beaten ox, a pagan ox. On the next page the Remonstrant said, by way of a spiritual and mocking reproach : "Truly, brethren, you have not well taken the heighth of the pole." Answer : "No marvel ; there be many more that do not take well the height of your pole, but will take better the declination of your altitude." Three quips of the same savour follow one upon the

other; all this looked pretty. Elsewhere, Salmasius exclaiming "that the sun itself never beheld a more outrageous action" than the murder of the king, Milton cleverly answers, "The sun has beheld many things that blind Bernard never saw. But we are content you should mention the sun over and over. And it will be a piece of prudence in you so to do. For though our wickedness does not require it, the coldness of the defence that you are making does."<sup>1</sup> The marvellous heaviness of these conceits betrays minds yet entangled in the swaddling-clothes of learning. The Reformation was the inauguration of free thought, but only the inauguration. Criticism was yet unborn; authority still presses with a full half of its weight upon the freest and boldest minds. Milton, to prove that it was lawful to put a king to death, quotes Orestes, the laws of Publicola, and the death of Nero. His *History of Britain* is a farrago of all the traditions and fables. Under every circumstance he adduces a text of Scripture for proof; his boldness consists in showing himself a bold grammarian, a valorous commentator. He is blindly Protestant as others were blindly Catholic. He leaves in its bondage the higher reason, the mother of principles; he has but emancipated a subordinate reason, an interpreter of texts. Like the vast half shapeless creatures, the birth of early times, he is yet but half man and half mud.

Can we expect urbanity here? Urbanity is the elegant dignity which answers insult by calm irony, and respects man whilst piercing a dogma. Milton coarsely knocks his adversary down. A bristling pedant, born from a Greek lexicon and a Syriac grammar,

<sup>1</sup> *A Defence of the People of England*, Mitford vi. 21.

Salmasius had disgorged upon the English people a vocabulary of insults and a folio of quotations. Milton replies to him in the same style; calling him a buffoon, a mountebank, "*professor triobolaris*," a hired pedant, a nobody, a rogue, a heartless being, a wretch, an idiot, sacrilegious, a slave worthy of rods and a pitchfork. A dictionary of big Latin words passed between them. "You, who know so many tongues, who read so many books, who write so much about them, you are yet but an ass." Finding the epithet good, he repeats and sanctifies it. "Oh most drivelling of asses, you come ridden by a woman, with the cured heads of bishops whom you had wounded, a little image of the great beast of the Apocalypse!" He ends by calling him savage beast, apostate, and devil. "Doubt not that you are reserved for the same end as Judas, and that, driven by despair rather than repentance, self-disgusted, you must one day hang yourself, and like your rival, burst asunder in your belly."<sup>1</sup> We fancy we are listening to the bellowing of two bulls.

They had all a bull's ferocity. Milton was a good hater. He fought with his pen, as the Ironsides with the sword, inch by inch, with a concentrated rancour and a fierce obstinacy. The bishops and the king then suffered for eleven years of despotism. Each man recalled the banishments, confiscations, punishments, the

<sup>1</sup> Mitford, vi. 250. Salmasius said of the death of the king: "Horribilis nuntius aures nostras astroci vulnere, sed magis mentes perculit." Milton replied: "Profecto nuntius iste horribilis aut gladium multo longiorem eo quem strinxit Petrus habuerit oportet, aut aures istae auritiissimae fuerint, quas tam longinquuo vulnere perculerit."

"Oratorem tam insipidum et insulsum ut ne ex lacrymis quidem ejus mica salis exiguiissima possit exprimi."

"Salmasius nova quadam metamorphosi salmacis factus est."

law violated systematically and relentlessly, the liberty of the subject attacked by a well-laid plot, Episcopal idolatry imposed on Christian consciences, the faithful preachers driven into the wilds of America, or given up to the executioner and the stocks.<sup>1</sup> Such reminiscences

<sup>1</sup> I copy from Neal's *History of the Puritans*, ii. ch. vii. 367, one of these sorrows and complaints. By the greatness of the outrage the reader can judge of the intensity of the hatred:—

“The humble petition of (Dr.) Alexander Leighton, Prisoner in the Fleet,—Humbly Sheweth,

“That on Feb. 17, 1630, he was apprehended coming from sermon by a high commission warrant, and dragged along the street with bills and staves to London-house. That the gaoler of Newgate being sent for, clapt him in irons, and carried him with a strong power into a loathsome and ruinous dog-hole, full of rats and mice, that had no light but a little grate, and the roof being uncovered, the snow and rain beat in upon him, having no bedding, nor place to make a fire, but the ruins of an old smoaky chimney. In this woeful place he was shut up for fifteen weeks, nobody being suffered to come near him, till at length his wife only was admitted. That the fourth day after his commitment the pursuivant, with a mighty multitude, came to his house to search for jesuits books, and used his wife in such a barbarous and inhuman manner as he is ashamed to express; that they rifled every person and place, holding a pistol to the breast of a child of five years old, threatening to kill him if he did not discover the books; that they broke open chests, presses, boxes, and carried away everything, even household stuff, apparel, arms, and other things; that at the end of fifteen weeks he was served with a subpoena, on an information laid against him by Sir Robert Heath, attorney-general, whose dealing with him was full of cruelty and deceit; but he was then sick, and, in the opinion of four physicians, thought to be poisoned, because all his hair and skin came off; that in the height of this sickness the cruel sentence was passed upon him mentioned in the year 1630, and executed Nov. 26 following, when he received thirty-six stripes upon his naked back with a threefold cord, his hands being tied to a stake, and then stood almost two hours in the pillory in the frost and snow, before he was branded in the face, his nose slit, and his ears cut off; that after this he was carried by water to the Fleet, and shut up in such a room that he was never well, and after eight years was turned into the common gaol.”

arising in powerful minds, stamped them with inexpiable hatred, and the writings of Milton bear witness to a rancour which is now unknown. The impression left by his *Eikonoklastes*<sup>1</sup> is oppressive. Phrase by phrase, harshly, bitterly, the king is refuted and accused to the last, without a minute's respite of accusation, the accused being credited with not the slightest good intention, the slightest excuse, the least show of justice, the accuser never for an instant digressing to or resting upon a general idea. It is a hand-to-hand fight, where every word takes effect, prolonged, obstinate, without dash and without weakness, full of a harsh and fixed hostility, where the only thought is how to wound most severely and to kill surely. Against the bishops, who were alive and powerful, his hatred flowed more violently still, and the fierceness of his envenomed metaphors hardly suffices to express it. Milton points to them "basking in the sunny warmth of wealth and promotion," like a brood of foul reptiles. "The sour leaven of human traditions, mixed in one putrified mass with the poisonous dregs of hypocrisie in the hearts of Prelates, . . . is the serpent's egg that will hatch an antichrist wheresoever, and engender the same monster as big or little as the lump is which breeds him."<sup>2</sup>

So much coarseness and dulness was as an outer breastplate, the mark and the protection of the super-abundant force and life which coursed in those athletic limbs and chests. Now-a-days, the mind being more refined has become feebler; convictions, being less stern, have become less strong. Attention, freed from the heavy scholastic logic and scriptural tyranny, has be-

<sup>1</sup> An answer to the *Eikon Basilike*, a work on the king's side, and attributed to the king. <sup>2</sup> *Of Reformation in England*, 4to, 1641, p. 62.

come more inert. Belief and the will, dissolved by universal tolerance and by the thousand opposing shocks of multiplied ideas, have engendered an exact and refined style, an instrument of conversation and pleasure, and have expelled the poetic and rude style, a weapon of war and enthusiasm. If we have effaced ferocity and dulness, we have diminished force and greatness.

Force and greatness are manifested in Milton, displayed in his opinions and his style, the sources of his belief and his talent. This proud reason aspired to unfold itself without shackles; it demanded that reason might unfold itself without shackles. It claimed for humanity what it coveted for itself, and championed every liberty in his every work. From the first he attacked the corpulent bishops, scholastic upstarts, persecutors of free discussion, pensioned tyrants of Christian conscience.<sup>1</sup> Above the clamour of the Protestant Revolution, his voice was heard thundering against tradition and obedience. He sourly railed at the pedantic theologians, devoted worshippers of old texts, who mistook a mouldy martyrology for a solid argument, and answered a demonstration with a quotation. He declared that most of the Fathers were turbulent and babbling intriguers, that they were not worth more collectively than individually, that their councils were but a pack of underhand intrigues and vain disputes; he rejected their authority and their example, and set up logic as the only interpreter of Scripture.<sup>2</sup> A Puritan as against bishops, an Independent as against Presbyterians he was always master

<sup>1</sup> *Of Reformation in England.*

<sup>2</sup> The loss of Cicero's works alone, or those of Livy, could not be repaired by all the Fathers of the church.

of his thought and the inventor of his own faith. No one better loved, practised, and praised the free and bold use of reason. He exercised it even rashly and scandalously. He revolted against custom, the illegitimate queen of human belief, the born and relentless enemy of truth, raised his hand against marriage, and demanded divorce in the case of incompatibility of temper. He declared that “error supports custom, custom countenances error; and these two between them, . . . with the numerous and vulgar train of their followers, . . . envy and cry down the industry of free reasoning, under the terms of humour and innovation.”<sup>1</sup> He showed that truth “never comes into the world, but like a bastard, to the ignominy of him that brought her forth; till Time, the midwife rather than the mother of truth, have washed and salted the infant, declared her legitimate.”<sup>2</sup> He stood out in three or four writings against the flood of insults and anathemas, and dared even more; he attacked the censorship before Parliament, though its own work; he spoke as a man who is wounded and oppressed, for whom a public prohibition is a personal outrage, who is himself fettered by the fetters of the nation. He does not want the pen of a paid “licenser,” to insult by its approval the first page of his book. He hates this ignorant and imperious hand, and claims liberty of writing on the same grounds as he claims liberty of thought:—

“What advantage is it to be a man, over it is to be a boy at school, if we have only escaped the ferula, to come under the fescue of an imprimatur? If serious and elaborate writings, as if they were no more than the theme of a grammar-lad under his pedagogue, must not be uttered without the cursory eyes of

<sup>1</sup> *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, Mitford, ii. 4.      <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 5.

a temporizing and extemporizing licenser! He who is not trusted with his own actions, his drift not being known to be evil, and standing to the hazard of law and penalty, has no great argument to think himself reputed in the commonwealth wherein he was born for other than a fool or a foreigner. When a man writes to the world, he summons up all his reason and deliberation to assist him; he searches, meditates, is industrious, and likely consults and confers with his judicious friends; after all which done, he takes himself to be informed in what he writes, as well as any that wrote before him; if in this, the most consummate act of his fidelity and ripeness, no years, no industry, no former proof of his abilities, can bring him to that state of maturity, as not to be still mistrusted and suspected, unless he carry all his considerate diligence, all his midnight watchings, and expense of Palladian oil, to the hasty view of an unleisured licenser, perhaps much his younger, perhaps far his inferior in judgment, perhaps one who never knew the labour of book writing; and if he be not repulsed, or slighted, must appear in print like a puny with his guardian, and his censor's hand on the back of his title to be his bail and surety, that he is no idiot or seducer; it cannot be but a dishonour and derogation to the author, to the book, to the privilege and dignity of learning."<sup>1</sup>

Throw open, then, all the doors; let there be light; let every man think, and bring his thoughts to the light. Dread not any diversities of opinion, rejoice in this great work; why insult the labourers by the name of schismatics and sectaries?

" Yet these are the men cried out against for schismatics and sectaries, as if, while the temple of the Lord was building, some cutting, some squaring the marble, others hewing the cedars, there should be a sort of irrational men, who could not consider there must be many schisms and many dissections made in the quarry and in the timber ere the house of God can be built.

<sup>1</sup> *Areopagitica*, Mitford. ii. 423-4.

And when every stone is laid artfully together, it cannot be united into a continuity, it can but be contiguous in this world: neither can every piece of the building be of one form; nay, rather the perfection consists in this, that out of many moderate varieties and brotherly dissimilitudes that are not vastly disproportional, arises the goodly and the graceful symmetry that commends the whole pile and structure.”<sup>1</sup>

Milton triumphs here through sympathy; he breaks forth into magnificent images, he displays in his style the force which he perceives around him and in himself. He lauds the revolution, and his praises seem like the blast of a trumpet, to come from a brazen throat:—

“Behold now this vast city, a city of refuge, the mansion-house of liberty, encompassed and surrounded with his protection; the shop of war has not there more anvils and hammers working, to fashion out the plates and instruments of armed justice in defence of beleagured truth, than there be pens and heads there, sitting by their studious lamps, musing, searching, revolving new notions and ideas wherewith to present, as with their homage and their fealty, the approaching reformation. . . . What could a man require more from a nation so pliant, and so prone to seek after knowledge? What wants there to such a towardly and pregnant soil, but wise and faithful labourers, to make a knowing people, a nation of prophets, of sages, and of worthies?<sup>2</sup> . . . Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks: methinks I see her as an eagle mewing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full midday beam; purging and unscaling her long-abused sight at the fountain itself of heavenly radiance; while the whole noise of timorous and flocking birds, with those also that love the twilight, flutter about, amazed at what she means, and in their envious gabble would prognosticate a year of sects and schisms.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Areopagitica*, Mitford, ii. 439.   <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 437-8.   <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 441.

It is Milton who speaks, and it is Milton whom he unwittingly describes.

With a sincere writer, doctrines foretell the style. The sentiments and needs which form and govern his beliefs, construct and colour his phrases. The same genius leaves once and again the same impress, in the thought and in the form. The power of logic and enthusiasm which explains the opinions of Milton, explains his genius. The sectary and the writer are one man, and we shall find the faculties of the sectary in the talent of the writer.

When an idea is planted in a logical mind, it grows and fructifies there in a multitude of accessory and explanatory ideas which surround it, entangled among themselves, and form a thicket and a forest. The sentences in Milton are immense ; page-long periods are necessary to enclose the train of so many linked arguments, and so many metaphors accumulated around the governing thought. In this great travail, heart and imagination are shaken ; Milton exults while he reasons, and the words come as from a catapult, doubling the force of their flight by their heavy weight. I dare not place before a modern reader the gigantic periods which commence the treatise *Of Reformation in England*. We no longer possess this power of breath ; we only understand little short phrases ; we cannot fix our attention on the same point for a page at a time. We require manageable ideas ; we have given up the big two-handed sword of our fathers, and we only carry a light foil. I doubt, however, if the piercing phraseology of Voltaire be more mortal than the cleaving of this iron mace :—

“ If in less noble and almost mechanick arts he is not

esteemed to deserve the name of a compleat architect, an excellent painter, or the like, that bears not a generous mind above the peasantly regard of wages and hire ; much more must we think him a most imperfect and incompleat Divine, who is so far from being a contemner of filthy lucre ; that his whole divinity is moulded and bred up in the beggarly and brutish hopes of a fat prebendary, deanery, or bishoprick.”<sup>1</sup>

If Michael Angelo’s prophets could speak, it would be in this style ; and twenty times while reading it, we may discern the sculptor.

The powerful logic which lengthens the periods sustains the images. If Shakspeare and the nervous poets embrace a picture in the compass of a fleeting expression, break upon their metaphors with new ones, and exhibit successively in the same phrase the same idea in five or six different forms, the abrupt motion of their winged imagination authorises or explains these varied colours and these mingling flashes. More connected and more master of himself, Milton develops to the end the threads which these poets break. All his images display themselves in little poems, a sort of solid allegory, of which all the interdependent parts concentrate their light on the single idea which they are intended to embellish or demonstrate :—

“ In this manner the prelates, . . . . coming from a mean and plebeian life on a sudden to be lords of stately palaces, rich furniture, delicious fare, and princely attendance, thought the plain and homespun verity of Christ’s gospel unfit any longer to hold their lordships’ acquaintance, unless the poor threadbare matron were put into better clothes : her chaste and modest veil surrounded with celestial beams, they overlaid with wanton tresses, and in a flaring tire bespeckled her with all the gaudy allurements of a whore.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Animadversions upon Remonstrants’ Defence*, Mitford, i. 234-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Of Reformation in England*, first book, Mitford, i. 23.

Politicians reply that this gaudy church supports royalty.

“What greater debasement can there be to royal dignity. whose towering and steadfast height rests upon the unmovable foundations of justice, and heroic virtue, than to chain it in a dependence of subsisting, or ruining, to the painted battlements and gaudy rottenness of prelatry, which want but one puff of the king’s to blow them down like a pasteboard house built of court-cards ?”<sup>1</sup>

Metaphors thus sustained receive a singular breadth, pomp, and majesty. They are spread forth without clashing together, like the wide folds of a scarlet cloak, bathed in light and fringed with gold.

Do not take these metaphors for an accident. Milton lavishes them, like a priest who in his worship exhibits splendours and wins the eye, to gain the heart. He has been nourished by the reading of Spenser. Drayton, Shakspeare, Beaumont, all the most sparkling poets; and the golden flow of the preceding age, though impoverished all around him and slackened within himself, has become enlarged like a lake through being dammed up in his heart. Like Shakspeare, he imagines at every turn, and even out of turn, and scandalises the classical and French taste.

“ . . . As if they could make God earthly and fleshly, because they could not make themselves heavenly and spiritual ; they began to draw down all the divine intercourse betwixt God and the soul, yea, the very shape of God himself, into an exterior and bodily form ; . . . they hallowed it, they fumed up, they sprinkled it, they bedecked it, not in robes of pure innocency, but of pure linen, with other deformed and fantastic dresses, in palls and mitres, and gewgaws fetched from Aaron’s old wardrobe,

<sup>1</sup> *Of Reformation in England*, second book, Mitford, i. 42.

or the flaminis vestry : then was the priest set to con his motions and his postures, his liturgies and his lurries, till the soul by this means, of overbodying herself, given up justly to fleshly delights, bated her wing space downward ; and finding the ease she had from her visible and sensuous colleague, the body in performance of religious duties, her pinions now broken, and flagging, shifted off from herself the labour of high soaring any more, forgot her heavenly flight, and left the dull and droiling carcase to plod on in the old road, and drudging trade of outward conformity.”<sup>1</sup>

If we did not discern here the traces of theological coarseness, we might fancy we were reading an imitator of the *Phædo*, and under the fanatical anger recognise the images of Plato. There is one phrase which for manly beauty and enthusiasm recalls the tone of the *Republic* :—“ I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat.”<sup>2</sup> But Milton is only Platonic by his richness and exaltation. For the rest, he is a man of the Renaissance, pedantic and harsh ; he insults the Pope, who, after the gift of Pepin le Bref, “ never ceased baiting and goring the successors of his best lord Constantine, what by his barking curses and excommunications ;”<sup>3</sup> he is mythological in his defence of the press, showing that formerly “ no envious Juno sat cross-legged over the nativity of any man’s intellectual offspring.”<sup>4</sup> It matters little : these learned, familiar, grand images, whatever they be, are powerful and natural. Super-

<sup>1</sup> *Of Reformation in England*, book first, Mitford, i. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Areopagitica*, ii. 411-12.

<sup>3</sup> *Of Reformation in England*, book second, 40.

<sup>4</sup> *Areopagitica*, ii. 406. “ Whatsoever time, or the heedless hand of

abundance, like crudity, here only manifests the vigour and lyric dash which Milton's character had foretold.

Passion follows naturally ; exaltation brings it with the images. Bold expressions, exaggeration of style, cause us to hear the vibrating voice of the suffering man, indignant and determined.

“ For books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are ; nay, they do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them. I know they are as lively, and as vigorously productive, as those fabulous dragon's teeth : and being sown up and down, may chance to spring up armed men. And yet, on the other hand, unless wariness be used, as good almost kill a man as kill a good book ; who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image ; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were, in the eye. Many a man lives a burden to the earth ; but a good book is the precious life-blood of a master-spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life. It is true, no age can restore a life, whereof, perhaps there is no great loss ; and revolutions of ages do not oft recover the loss of a rejected truth, for the want of which whole nations fare the worse. We should be wary, therefore, what persecution we raise against the living labours of public men, how we spill that seasoned life of man, preserved and stored up in books ; since we see a kind of homicide may be thus committed, sometimes a martyrdom ; and if it extend to the whole impression, a kind of massacre, whereof the execution ends not in the slaying of an elemental life, but strikes at the ethereal and fifth essence, the breath of reason itself ; slays an immortality rather than a life.”<sup>1</sup>

blind chance, hath drawn down from of old to this present, in her huge drag-net, whether fish or sea-weed, shells or shrubs, unpicked, unchosen, those are the fathers.” (*Of Prelatical Episcopacy*, Mitford, i. 73.)

<sup>1</sup> *Areopagitica*, *ibid.* ii. 400.

This energy is sublime ; the man is equal to the cause, and never did a loftier eloquence match a loftier truth. Terrible expressions overwhelm the book-tyrants, the profaners of thought, the assassins of liberty. “The council of Trent and the Spanish inquisition, engendering together, brought forth or perfected those catalogues and expurgating indexes, that rake through the entrails of many an old good author, with a violation worse than any that could be offered to his tomb.”<sup>1</sup> Similar expressions lash the carnal minds which believe without thinking, and make their servility into a religion. There is a passage which, by its bitter familiarity, recalls Swift, and surpasses him in all loftiness of imagination and genius :—

“A man may be an heretic in the truth, and if he believes things only because his pastor says so, . . . the very truth he holds becomes his heresy. . . . A wealthy man, addicted to his pleasure and to his profits, finds religion to be a traffic so entangled, and of so many piddling accounts, that of all mysteries he cannot skill to keep a stock going upon that trade. . . . What does he therefore, but resolves to give over toiling, and to find himself out some factor, to whose care and credit he may commit the whole managing of his religious affairs ; some divine of note and estimation that must be. To him he adheres, resigns the whole warehouse of his religion, with all the locks and keys, into his custody ; and indeed makes the very person of that man his religion. . . . So that a man may say his religion is now no more within himself, but is become a divilual movable, and goes and comes near him, according as that good man frequents the house. He entertains him, gives him gifts, feasts him, lodges him ; his religion comes home at night, prays, is liberally supped, and sumptuously laid to sleep ; rises, is saluted, and after the malmsey, or some well-spiced bruage, . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Areopagitica*, Mitford, ii. 404.

his religion walks abroad at eight, and leaves his kind entertainer in the shop trading all day without his religion.”<sup>1</sup>

He condescended to mock for an instant, with what piercing irony we have seen. But irony, piercing as it may be, seems to him weak.<sup>2</sup> Hear him when he comes to himself, when he returns to open and serious invective, when after the carnal believer he overwhelms the carnal prelate:—

“The table of communion, now become a table of separation, stands like an exalted platform upon the brow of the quire, fortified with bulwark and barricado, to keep off the profane touch of the laics, whilst the obscene and surfeited priest scruples not to paw and mammoc the sacramental bread, as familiarly as his tavern biscuit.”<sup>3</sup>

He triumphs in believing that all these profanations are to be avenged. The horrible doctrine of Calvin has once more fixed men’s gaze on the dogma of reprobation and everlasting damnation. Hell in hand, Milton menaces; he is drunk with justice and vengeance amid the abysses which he opens, and the brands which he wields:—

“They shall be thrown downe eternally into the *darkest* and *deepest* *Gulfe* of *HELL*, where, under the *despightfull controule*, the trample and spurne of all the other *Damned*, that in the anguish of their *Torture* shall have no other ease than to exercise a *Raving* and *Bestiall Tyranny* over them as their *Slaves* and

<sup>1</sup> *Areopagitica*, Mitford ii. 431-2.

<sup>2</sup> When he is simply comic, he becomes, like Hogarth and Swift, eccentric, rude, and farcical. “A bishop’s foot that has all his toes, mangre the gout, and a linen sock over it, is the aptest emblem of the prelate himself; who, being a pluralist, may, under one surplice, which is also linen, hide four benefices, besides the great metropolitan toe.”—*An Apology*, etc., i. 275.

<sup>3</sup> *Of Reformation in England*, Mitford, i. 17.

*Negro's*, they shall remaine in that pligt for ever, the *basest*, the *lowermost*, the *most dejected*, most *underfoot*, and *down-trodden Vassals of Perdition*.<sup>1</sup>

Fury here mounts to the sublime, and Michael Angelo's Christ is not more inexorable and vengeful.

Let us fill the measure ; let us add, as he does, the prospects of heaven to the visions of darkness ; the pamphlet becomes a hymn :

“ When I recall to mind at last, after so many dark ages, wherein the huge overshadowing train of error had almost swept all the stars out of the firmament of the church ; how the bright and blissful Reformation (by divine power) struck through the black and settled night of ignorance and anti-christian tyranny, methinks a sovereign and reviving joy must needs rush into the bosom of him that reads or hears ; and the sweet odour of the returning gospel imbathe his soul with the fragrancy of heaven.”<sup>2</sup>

Overloaded with ornaments, infinitely prolonged, these periods are triumphant choruses of angelic alleluias sung by deep voices to the accompaniment of ten thousand harps of gold. In the midst of his syllogisms, Milton prays, sustained by the accent of the prophets, surrounded by memories of the Bible, ravished with the splendours of the Apocalypse, but checked on the brink of hallucination by science and logic, on the summit of the calm clear atmosphere, without rising to the burning tracts where ecstasy dissolves reason, with a majesty of eloquence and a solemn grandeur never surpassed, whose perfection proves that he has entered his domain, and gives promise of the poet beyond the prose-writer :—

<sup>1</sup> *Of Reformation in England*, Mitford, i. 71. [The old spelling has been retained in this passage.—Tr.] <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 4.

"Thou, therefore, that sittest in light and glory unapproachable, parent of angels and men ! next, thee I implore, omnipotent King, Redeemer of that lost remnant whose nature thou didst assume, ineffable and everlasting Love ! and thou, the third subsistence of divine infinitude, illumining Spirit, the joy and solace of created things ! one Tri-personal Godhead ! look upon this thy poor and almost spent and expiring church. . . . O let them not bring about their damned designs, . . . to reinvoke us in that pitchy cloud of infernal darkness, where we shall never more see the sun of thy truth again, never hope for the cheerful dawn, never more hear the bird of morning sing."<sup>1</sup>

"O Thou the ever-begotten Light and perfect Image of the Father, . . . Who is there that cannot trace thee now in thy beamy walk through the midst of thy sanctuary, amidst those golden candlesticks, which have long suffered a dimness amongst us through the violence of those that had seized them, and were more taken with the mention of their gold than of their starry light ? . . . Come therefore, O thou that hast the seven stars in thy right hand, appoint thy chosen priests according to their orders and courses of old, to minister before thee, and duly to press and pour out the consecrated oil into thy holy and ever-burning lamps. Thou hast sent out the spirit of prayer upon thy servants over all the land to this effect, and stirred up their vows as the sound of many waters about thy throne. . . . O perfect and accomplish thy glorious acts ! . . . Come forth out of thy royal chambers, O Prince of all the kings of the earth ! put on the visible robes of thy imperial majesty, take up that unlimited sceptre which thy Almighty Father hath bequeathed thee ; for now the voice of thy bride calls thee, and all creatures sigh to be renewed."<sup>2</sup>

This song of supplication and joy is an outpouring of

<sup>1</sup> *Of Reformation in England*, Mitford, i. 68-69.

<sup>2</sup> *Animadversions*, etc., *ibid.* 220-2.

splendours; and if we search all literature, we will hardly find a poet equal to this writer of prose.

Is he truly a prose-writer? Entangled dialectics, a heavy and awkward mind, fanatical and ferocious rusticity, an epic grandeur of sustained and super-abundant images, the blast and the recklessness of implacable and all-powerful passion, the sublimity of religious and lyric exaltation; we do not recognise in these features a man born to explain, persuade, and prove. The scholasticism and coarseness of the time have blunted or rusted his logic. Imagination and enthusiasm carried him away and enchainèd him in metaphor. Thus dazzled or marred, he could not produce a perfect work; he did but write useful tracts, called forth by practical interests and actual hate, and fine isolated morsels, inspired by collision with a grand idea, and by the sudden burst of genius. Yet, in all these abandoned fragments, the man shows in his entirety. The systematic and lyric spirit is manifested in the pamphlet as well as in the poem; the faculty of embracing general effects, and of being shaken by them, remains the same in Milton's two careers, and we will see in the *Paradise* and *Comus* what we have met with in the treatise *Of Reformation*, and in the *Animadversions on the Remonstrant*.

## VI.

"Milton has acknowledged to me," writes Dryden, "that Spencer was his original." In fact, by the purity and elevation of their morals, by the fulness and connection of their style, by the noble chivalric sentiments, and their fine classical arrangement, they are

brothers. But Milton had yet other masters—Beaumont, Fletcher, Burton, Drummond, Ben Jonson, Shakspeare, the whole splendid English Renaissance, and behind it the Italian poesy, Latin antiquity, the fine Greek literature, and all the sources whence the English Renaissance sprang. He continued the great current, but in a manner of his own. He took their mythology, their allegories, sometimes their conceits,<sup>1</sup> and discovered anew their rich colouring, their magnificent sentiment of living nature, their inexhaustible admiration of forms and colours. But, at the same time, he transformed their diction, and employed poetry in a new service. He wrote, not by impulse, and at the mere contact with things, but like a man of letters, a classic, in a scholarlike manner, with the assistance of books, seeing objects as much through previous writings as in themselves, adding to his images the images of others, borrowing and re-casting their inventions, as an artist who unites and multiplies the bosses and driven gold, already entwined on a diadem by twenty workmen. He made thus for himself a composite and brilliant style, less natural than that of his precursors, less fit for effusions, less akin to the lively first glow of sensation, but more solid, more regular, more capable of concentrating in one large patch of light all their sparkle and splendour. He brings together like *Æschylus*, words of “six cubits,” plumed and decked in purple, and makes them pass like a royal train before his idea to exalt and announce it. He introduces to us

“The breathing roses of the wood,  
Fair silver-buskin’d nymphs;”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the *Hymn on the Nativity*; amongst others, the first few strophes. See also *Lyrides*.

<sup>2</sup> *Arcades*, l. 22.

and tells how

“ The gray-hooded Even,  
Like a sad votarist in palmer’s weed,  
Rose from the hindmost wheels of Phœbus’ wain ; ”<sup>1</sup>

and speaks of

“ All the sea-girt isles,  
That, like to rich and various gems, inlay  
The unadorned bosom of the deep ; ”<sup>2</sup>

and

“ That undisturbed song of pure concert,  
Aye sung before the sapphire-colour’d throne,  
To Him that sits thereon,  
With saintly shout, and solemn jubilee ;  
Where the bright Seraphim, in burning row,  
Their loud-uplifted angel-trumpets blow.”<sup>3</sup>

He gathered into full nosegays the flowers scattered through the other poets :

“ Ye valleys low, where the mild whispers use  
Of shades, and wanton winds, and gushing brooks,  
On whose fresh lap the swart-star sparingly looks ;  
Throw hither all your quaint enamell’d eyes,  
That on the green turf suck the honied showers,  
And purple all the ground with vernal flowers.  
Bring the rathe primrose that forsaken dies,  
The tufted crow-toe, and pale jessamine,  
The white pink, and the pansy freak’d with jet,  
The glowing violet,  
The musk-rose, and the well-attired woodbine,  
With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,

<sup>1</sup> *Odes*, l. 188-190.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* l. 21-23.

<sup>3</sup> *Ode at a Solemn Musick*, l. 6-11.

And every flower that sad embroidery wears :  
 Bid amaranthus all his beauty shed,  
 And daffadillies fill their cups with tears,  
 To strew the laureat herse where Lycid lies.”<sup>1</sup>

When still quite young, on his quitting Cambridge, he inclined to the magnificent and grand ; he wanted a great flowing verse, an ample and sounding strophe, vast periods of fourteen and four-and-twenty lines. He did not face objects on a level, as a mortal, but from on high, like those archangels of Goethe,<sup>2</sup> who embrace at a glance the whole ocean lashing its coasts and the earth rolling on, wrapt in the harmony of the fraternal stars. It was not life that he felt, like the masters of the Renaissance, but grandeur, like Æschylus, and the Hebrew seers,<sup>3</sup> manly and lyric spirits like his own, who, nourished like him in religious emotions and continuous enthusiasm, like him displayed sacerdotal pomp and majesty. To express such a sentiment, images, and poetry addressed only to the eyes, were not enough ; sounds also were requisite, and that more introspective poetry which, purged from corporeal shows, could reach the soul. Milton was a musician ; his hymns rolled with the slowness of a measured song and the gravity of a declamation ; and he seems himself to be describing his art in these incomparable verses, which are evolved like the solemn harmony of an anthem :

“ But else, in deep of night, when drowsiness  
 Hath lock’d up mortal sense, then listen I  
 To the celestial sirens’ harmony,

<sup>1</sup> *Lycidas*, l. 136–151.

<sup>2</sup> *Faust*, Prolog im Himmel.

<sup>3</sup> See the prophecy against Archbishop Laud in *Lycidas*, l. 130 :

“ But that two-handed engine at the door  
 Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more.”

That sit upon the nine infolded spheres,  
And sing to those that hold the vital shears,  
And turn the adamantine spindle round,  
On which the fate of Gods and men is wound,  
Such sweet compulsion doth in musick lie,  
To lull the daughters of Necessity,  
And keep unsteady Nature to her law,  
And the low world in measured motion draw  
After the heavenly tune, which none can hear  
Of human mould, with gross unpurged ear.”<sup>1</sup>

With his style, his subjects differed ; he compacted and ennobled the poet’s domain as well as his language, and consecrated his thoughts as well as his words. He who knows the true nature of poetry soon finds, as Milton said a little later, what despicable creatures “libidinous and ignorant poetasters” are, and to what religious, glorious, splendid use poetry can be put in things divine and human. “These abilities, wheresoever they be found are the inspired gift of God, rarely bestowed, but yet to some (though most abuse) in every nation ; and are of power, beside the office of a pulpit, to imbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility, to allay the perturbations of the mind, and set the affections in right tune ; to celebrate in glorious and lofty hymns the throne and equipage of God’s almighty ness, and what he works, and what he suffers to be wrought with high providence in his church ; to sing the victorious agonies of martyrs and saints, the deeds and triumphs of just and pious nations, doing valiantly through faith against the enemies of Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Arcades*, l. 61-73.

<sup>2</sup> *The Reason of Church Government*, book ii. Mitford, l. 147.

In fact, from the first, at St. Paul's School and at Cambridge, he had written paraphrases of the *Psalms*, then composed odes on the *Nativity*, *Circumcision*, and the *Passion*. Presently appeared sad poems on the *Death of a Fair Infant*, *An Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester*; then grave and noble verses *On Time*, *At a solemn Musick*, a sonnet *On his being arrived to the Age of Twenty-three*, "his late spring which no bud or blossom shew'd." At last we have him in the country with his father, and the hopes, dreams, first enchantments of youth, rise from his heart like the morning breath of a summer's day. But what a distance between these calm and bright contemplations and the warm youth, the voluptuous *Adonis* of Shakespeare! He walked, used his eyes, listened; there his joys ended; they are but the poetic joys of the soul:

"To hear the lark begin his flight,  
And singing, startle the dull night,  
From his watch-tower in the skies,  
Till the dappled dawn doth rise; . . .  
While the plowman, near at hand,  
Whistles o'er the furrow'd land,  
And the milk-maid singeth blithe,  
And the mower whets his sithe,  
And every shepherd tells his tale  
Under the hawthorn in the dale."<sup>1</sup>

To see the village dances and gaiety; to look upon the "high triumphs" and the "busy hum of men" in the "tower'd cities;" above all, to abandon himself to melody, to the divine roll of sweet verse, and the charming dreams which they spread before us in a

<sup>1</sup> *L'Allegro*, l. 41-68.

golden light ;—this is all ; and presently, as if he had gone too far, to counterbalance this eulogy of visible joys, he summons Melancholy :

“ Come, pensive Nun, devout and pure,  
Sober, stedfast, and demure,  
All in a robe of darkest grain,  
Flowing with majestick train,  
And sable stole of Cypress lawn  
Over thy decent shoulders drawn.  
Come, but keep thy wonted state,  
With even step, and musing gait ;  
And looks commerçing with the skies,  
Thy rapt soul sitting in thine eyes.”<sup>1</sup>

With her he wanders amidst grave thoughts and grave sights, which recall a man to his condition, and prepare him for his duties, now amongst the lofty colonnades of primeval trees, whose “ high-embowed roof ” retains the silence and the twilight under their shade ; now in

“ The studious cloysters pale, . . .  
With antick pillars massy proof,  
And storied windows richly dight,  
Casting a dim religious light ; ”<sup>2</sup>

now again in the retirement of the study, where the cricket chirps, where the lamp of labour shines, where the mind, alone with the noble minds of the past, may

“ Unsphe  
The spirit of Plato, to unfold  
What worlds or what vast regions hold  
The immortal mind, that hath forsook  
Her mansion in this fleshly nook.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Il Penseroso*, l. 31–40.   <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* l. 156–160.   <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* l. 88–92.

He was filled with this lofty philosophy. Whatever the language he used, English, Italian, or Latin, whatever the kind of verse, sonnets, hymns, stanzas, tragedy or epic, he always returned to it. He praised everywhere chaste love, piety, generosity, heroic force. It was not from scruple, but it was innate in him; his chief need and faculty led him to noble conceptions. He took a delight in admiring, as Shakspeare in creating, as Swift in destroying, as Byron in combating, as Spenser in dreaming. Even on ornamental poems, which were only employed to exhibit costumes and introduce fairy-tales, in *Masques*, like those of Ben Jonson, he impressed his own character. They were amusements for the castle; he made out of them lectures on magnanimity and constancy: one of them, *Comus*, well worked out, with a complete originality and extraordinary elevation of style, is perhaps his masterpiece, and is simply the ~~the~~ gy of virtue.

Here at the beginning we are in the heavens. A spirit, descended in the midst of wild woods, repeats this ode:

“Before the starry threshold of Jove’s court  
My mansion is, where those immortal shapes  
Of bright aerial spirits live insphered  
In regions mild of calm and serene air,  
Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot,  
Which men call earth; and, with low-thoughted care  
Confined, and pester’d in this pinfold here,  
Strive to keep up a frail and feverish being,  
Unmindful of the crown that Virtue gives,  
After this mortal change, to her true servants,  
Amongst the enthron’d Gods on sainted seats.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Comus*, l. 1-II.

Such characters cannot speak : they sing. The drama is an antique opera, composed like the *Prometheus*, of solemn hymns. The spectator is transported beyond the real world. He does not listen to men, but to sentiments. He hears a concert, as in Shakspeare ; the *Comus* continues the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, as a choir of deep men's voices continues the glowing and sad symphony of the instruments :

“Through the perplex'd paths of this drear wood,  
The nodding horror of whose shady brows  
Threats the forlorn and wandering passenger,”<sup>1</sup>

strays a noble lady, separated from her two brothers, troubled by the “sound of riot and ill-managed merriment” which she hears from afar. The son of Circe the enchantress, sensual Comus enters with a charming rod in one hand, his glass in the other, amid the clamour of men and women, with torches in their hands, “headed like sundry sorts of wild beasts ;” it is the hour when

“The sounds and seas, with all their finny drove,  
Now to the moon in wavering morrice move ;  
And, on the tawny sands and shelves  
Trip the pert faeries and the dapper elves.”<sup>2</sup>

The lady is terrified, and sinks on her knees ; and in the misty forms which float above in the pale light, perceives the mysterious and heavenly guardians who watch over her life and honour :

“O, welcome, pure-eyed Faith ; white-handed Hope,  
Thou hovering angel, girt with golden wings ;  
And thou, unblemish'd form of Chastity,

<sup>1</sup> *Comus*, l. 37-39.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* l. 115-118.

I see ye visibly, and now believe  
 That He, the Supreme good, t' whom all things ill  
 Are but as slavish officers of vengeance,  
 Would send a glistening guardian, if need were,  
 To keep my life and honour unassail'd.  
 Was I deceived, or did a sable cloud  
 Turn forth her silver lining on the night?  
 I did not err; there does a sable cloud  
 Turn forth her silver lining on the night,  
 And casts a gleam over this tufted grove."<sup>1</sup>

She calls her brothers in "a soft and solemn-breathing sound," which "rose like a steam of rich distill'd perfumes, and stole upon the air,"<sup>2</sup> across the "violet-embroider'd vale," to the dissolute god whom she enchant's. He comes disguised as a "gentle shepherd," and says:

"Can any mortal mixture of earth's mould  
 Breathe such divine, enchanting ravishment?  
 Sure something holy lodges in that breast,  
 And with these raptures moves the vocal air  
 To testify his hidden residence.  
 How sweetly did they float upon the wings  
 Of silence, through the empty-vaulted night,  
 At every fall smoothing the raven down  
 Of darkness, till it smiled! I have oft heard  
 My mother Circe with the syrens three,  
 Amidst the flowery-kirtled Naiades,  
 Calling their potent herbs and baleful drugs;  
 Who, as they sung, would take the prison'd soul,  
 And lap it in Elysium: Scylla wept,  
 And chid her barking waves into attention. .  
 But such a sacred and home-felt delight,  
 Such sober certainty of waking bliss,  
 I never heard till now."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ovid.* l. 213-225.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* l. 555-557.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* l. 244-264.

They were heavenly songs which Comus heard ; Milton describes, and at the same time imitates them ; he makes us understand the saying of his master Plato, that virtuous melodies teach virtue.

Circe's son has by deceit carried off the noble lady, and seats her, with " nerves all chained up," in a sumptuous palace before a table spread with all dainties. She accuses him, resists, insults him, and the style assumes an air of heroical indignation, to scorn the offer of the tempter.

" When lust,  
By unchaste looks, loose gestures, and foul talk,  
But most by lewd and lavish act of sin,  
Lets in defilement to the inward parts ;  
The soul grows clotted by contagion,  
Imbodies and imbrutes, till she quite lose  
The divine property of her first being.  
Such are those thick and gloomy shadows damp,  
Oft seen in charnel vaults and sepulchres  
Lingering, and sitting by a new-made grave,  
As loth to leave the body that it loved."<sup>1</sup>

" A cold shuddering dew dips all o'er" Comus ; he presents a cup of wine ; at the same instant the brothers, led by the attendant Spirit, rush upon him with swords drawn. He flees, carrying off his magic wand. To free the enchanted lady, they summon Sabrina, the benevolent naiad, who sits

" Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,  
In twisted braids of lilies knitting  
The loose train of thy (her) amber-dropping hair."<sup>2</sup>

The "goddess of the silver lake" rises lightly from her

<sup>1</sup> *Comus*, l. 463-473. It is the elder brother who utters these lines when speaking of his sister.—*Ta.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid. l. 861-863.*

"coral-paven bed," and her chariot "of turkis blue and emerald-green," sets her down

"By the rushy-fringed bank,  
Where grows the willow, and the oxier dank."<sup>1</sup>

Sprinkled by this cool and chaste hand, the lady leaves the "venom'd seat" which held her spell-bound; the brothers, with their sister, reign peacefully in their father's palace; and the Spirit, who has conducted all, pronounces this ode, in which poetry leads up to philosophy; the voluptuous light of an Oriental legend beams on the Elysium of the good, and all the splendours of nature assemble to render virtue more seductive.

"To the ocean now I fly,  
And those happy climes that lie  
Where day never shuts his eye  
Up in the broad fields of the sky :  
There I suck the liquid air  
All amidst the gardens fair  
Of Hesperus, and his daughters three  
That sing about the golden tree :  
Along the crisped shades and bowers  
Revels the spruce and jocund spring ;  
The Graces, and the rosy-bosom'd Hours,  
Thither all their bounties bring ;  
There eternal Summer dwells,  
And west winds, with musky wing,  
About the cedar'n alleys fling  
Nard and cassia's balmy smella.  
Iris there with humid bow  
Waters the odorous banks, that blow  
Flowers of more mingled hew  
Than her purfled scarf can shew ;

<sup>1</sup> *Comus*, l. 890.

And drenches with Elysian dew  
(List, mortals, if your ears be true)  
Beds of hyacinth and roses,  
Where young Adonis oft reposes,  
Waxing well of his deep wound  
In slumber soft ; and on the ground  
Sadly sits the Assyrian queen :  
But far above in spangled sheen  
Celestial Cupid, her famed son, advanced  
Holds his dear Psyche sweet entranced  
After her wandering labours long,  
Till free consent the gods among  
Make her his eternal bride,  
And from her fair unspotted side  
Two blissful twins are to be born,  
Youth and Joy ; so Jove hath sworn.  
But now my task is smoothly done,  
I can fly, or I can run  
Quickly to the green earth's end,  
Where the bow'd welkin slow doth bend ;  
And from thence can soar as soon  
To the corners of the moon.  
Mortals, that would follow me,  
Love Virtue, she alone is free :  
She can teach ye how to climb  
Higher than the sphery chime ;  
Or, if Virtue feeble were,  
Heaven itself would stoop to her."<sup>1</sup>

Ought I to have pointed out the awkwardnesses, strangenesses, exaggerated expressions, the inheritance of the Renaissance, a philosophical quarrel, the work of a reasoner and a Platonist ? I did not perceive these faults. All was effaced before the spectacle of the bright

<sup>1</sup> *Oeuvres*, l. 976-1023.

Renaissance, transformed by austere philosophy, and of sublimity worshipped upon an altar of flowers.

That, I think, was his last profane poem. Already, in the one which followed, *Lycidas*, celebrating in the style of Virgil the death of a beloved friend,<sup>1</sup> he suffers Puritan wrath and prepossessions to shine through, inveighs against the bad teaching and tyranny of the bishops, and speaks of "that two-handed engine at the door, ready to smite (but) once, and smite no more." On his return from Italy, controversy and action carried him away; prose begins, poetry is arrested. From time to time a patriotic or religious sonnet breaks the long silence; now to praise the chief Puritans, Cromwell, Vane, Fairfax; now to celebrate the death of a pious lady, or the life of a "virtuous young lady;" once to pray God "to avenge his slaughter'd saints," the unhappy Protestants of Piedmont, "whose bones lie scatter'd on the Alpine mountains cold;" again, on his second wife, dead a year after their marriage, his well-beloved "saint"—"brought to me, like Alcestis, from the grave, . . . came, vested all in white, pure as her mind;" loyal friendships, sorrows bowed to or subdued, aspirations generous or stoical, which reverses did but purify. Old age came; cut off from power, action, even hope, he returned to the grand dreams of his youth. As of old, he went out of this lower world in search of the sublime; for the actual is petty, and the familiar seems dull. He selects his new characters on the verge of sacred antiquity, as he selected his old ones on the verge of fabulous antiquity, because distance adds to their stature; and habit, ceasing to measure, ceases also to depreciate them. Just now we had creatures of fancy:

<sup>1</sup> Edward King died in 1637.

Joy, daughter of Zephyr and Aurora ; Melancholy, daughter of Vesta and Saturn ; Comus, son of Circe, ivy-crowned, god of echoing woods and turbulent excess. Now we have Samson, the despiser of giants, the elect of Israel's God, the destroyer of idolaters, Satan and his peers, Christ and his angels ; they come and rise before our eyes like superhuman statues ; and their far removal, rendering vain our curious hands, preserves our admiration and their majesty. We rise further and higher, to the origin of things, amongst eternal beings, to the commencement of thought and life, to the battles of God, in this unknown world where sentiments and existences, raised above the ken of man, elude his judgment and criticism to command his veneration and awe ; the sustained song of solemn verse unfolds the actions of these shadowy figures ; and then we experience the same emotion as in a cathedral, while the music of the organ rolls along among the arches, and amidst the brilliant light of the tapers clouds of incense hide from our view the colossal columns.

But if the heart remains unchanged, the genius has become transformed. Manliness has supplanted youth. The richness has decreased, the severity has increased. Seventeen years of fighting and misfortune have steeped his soul in religious ideas. Mythology has yielded to theology ; the habit of discussion has ended by subduing the lyric flight ; accumulated learning by choking the original genius. The poet no more sings sublime verse, he relates or harangues, in grave verse. He no longer invents a personal style ; he imitates antique tragedy or epic. In *Samson Agonistes* he hits upon a cold and lofty tragedy, in *Paradise Regained* on a cold

and noble epic ; he composes an imperfect and sublime poem in *Paradise Lost*.

Would to Heaven he could have written it as he tried, in the shape of a drama, or better, as the *Prometheus* of *Æschylus*, as a lyric opera ! A peculiar kind of subject demands a peculiar kind of style ; if you resist, you destroy your work, too happy if, in the deformed medley, chance produces and preserves a few beautiful fragments. To bring the supernatural upon the scene, you must not continue in your every-day mood ; if you do, you look as if you did not believe in it. Vision reveals it, and the style of vision must express it. When Spenser writes, he dreams. We listen to the happy concerts of his aerial music, and the varying train of his fanciful apparitions unfolds like a vapour before our accommodating and dazzled gaze. When Dante writes, he is rapt ; and his cries of anguish, his transports, the incoherent succession of his infernal or mystical phantoms, carry us with him into the invisible world which he describes. Ecstasy alone renders visible and credible the objects of ecstasy. If you tell us of the exploits of the Deity as you tell us of Cromwell's, in a grave and lofty tone, we do not see God ; and as He constitutes the whole of your poem, we do not see anything. We conclude that you have accepted a tradition, that you adorn it with the fictions of your mind, that you are a preacher, not a prophet, a decorator not a poet. We find that you sing of God as the vulgar pray to him, after a formula learnt, not from spontaneous emotion. Change your style, or, rather if you can, change your emotion. Try and discover in yourself the ancient fervour of psalmists and apostles, to re-create the divine legend, to experience the sublime

agitations by which the inspired and disturbed mind perceives God ; then the grand lyric verse will roll on, laden with splendours. Thus roused, we shall not have to examine whether it be Adam or Messiah who speaks ; we shall not have to demand that they shall be real, and constructed by the hand of a psychologist ; we shall not trouble ourselves with their puerile or unlooked for actions ; we shall be carried away, we shall share in your creative madness ; we shall be drawn onward by the flow of bold images, or raised by the combination of gigantic metaphors ; we shall be moved like Æschylus, when his thunder-stricken Prometheus hears the universal concert of rivers, seas, forests, and created beings, lament with him,<sup>1</sup> as David before Jehovah, for whom a thousand years are but as yesterday, who “ carriest them away as with a flood ; in the morning they are like grass which groweth up.”<sup>2</sup>

But the age of metaphysical inspiration, long gone by, had not yet reappeared. Far in the past Dante was fading away ; far in the future Goethe lay unrevealed. People saw not yet the pantheistic *Faust*, and that incomprehensible nature which absorbs all varying existence in her deep bosom ; they saw no longer the mystic paradise and immortal Love, whose ideal light envelopes souls redeemed. Protestantism had neither altered nor renewed the divine nature ; the guardian of an accepted creed and ancient tradition, it had only transformed ecclesiastical

<sup>1</sup> ο διος αιθηρ καλ ταχύπτεροι πνοαι  
ποταμών τε πηγαί, ποτίων τε κυμάτων  
αιθρίθμος γέλασμα, παμφήτωρ τε γῆ,  
καλ τὸν πανπτην κύκλον καλῶ,  
θεού μ', οὐ πρὸς θεῶν πάσχει θεός.

*Prometheus Vinctus*, ed. Hermann, p. 487, line 88.—*Tl.*

<sup>2</sup> Ps. xc. 5.

discipline and the doctrine of grace. It had only called the Christian to personal salvation and freedom from priestly rule. It had only remodelled man, it had not re-created the Deity. It could not produce a divine epic, but a human epic. It could not sing the battles and works of God, but the temptations and salvation of the soul. At the time of Christ came the poems of coamogony ; at the time of Milton, the confessions of psychology. At the time of Christ each imagination produced a hierarchy of supernatural beings, and a history of the world ; at the time of Milton, every heart recorded the series of its upliftings, and the history of grace. Learning and reflection led Milton to a metaphysical poem which was not the natural offspring of the age, whilst inspiration and ignorance revealed to Bunyan the psychological narrative which suited the age, and the great man's genius was feebler than the tinker's simplicity.

And why ? Because Milton's poem, whilst it suppresses lyrical illusion, admits critical inquiry. Free from enthusiasm we judge his characters ; we demand that they shall be living, real, complete, harmonious, like those of a novel or a drama. No longer hearing odes, we would see objects and souls : we ask that Adam and Eve should act in conformity with their primitive nature ; that God, Satan, and Messiah should act and feel in conformity with their superhuman nature. Shakspeare would scarcely have been equal to the task ; Milton, the logician and reasoner, failed in it. He gives us correct solemn discourse, and gives us nothing more ; his characters are speeches, and in their sentiments we find only heaps of puerilities and contradictions.

Adam and Eve, the first pair ! I approach, and it seems as though I discovered the Adam and Eve of



Raphael Sanzio, imitated by Milton, so his biographers tell us, glorious, strong voluptuous children, naked in the light of heaven, motionless and absorbed before grand landscapes, with bright vacant eyes, with no more thought than the bull or the horse on the grass beside them. I listen, and I hear an English household, two reasoners of the period—Colonel Hutchinson and his wife. Good Heavens! dress them at once. People with so much culture should have invented before all a pair of trousers and modesty. What dialogues! Dissertations capped by politeness, mutual sermons concluded by bows. What bows! Philosophical compliments and moral smiles. I yielded, says Eve,

“And from that time see  
How beauty is excell'd by manly grace  
And wisdom, which alone is truly fair.”<sup>1</sup>

Dear learned poet, you would have been better pleased if one of your three wives, as an apt pupil, had uttered to you by way of conclusion the above solid theoretical maxim. They did utter it to you; this is a scene from your own household:

“So spake our general mother; and, with eyes  
Of conjugal attraction unreproved  
And meek surrender, half-embracing lean'd  
On our first father; half her swelling breast  
Naked met his, under the flowing gold  
Of her loose tresses hid; he, in delight  
Both of her beauty and submissive charms,  
Smiled with superiour love, . . . and press'd her matron lip  
With kisses pure.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, book iv. l. 489.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* l. 492-503.

This Adam entered Paradise *via* England. In that country he learned respectability, and studied moral speechifying. Let us hear this man before he has tasted of the tree of knowledge. A bachelor of arts, in his inaugural address, could not utter more fitly and nobly a greater number of pithless sentences :

“ Fair consort, the hour  
Of night, and all things now retired to rest,  
Mind us of like repose ; since God hath set  
Labour and rest, as day and night, to men  
Successive ; and the timely dew of sleep,  
Now falling with soft slumbrous weight, inclines  
Our eyelids ; other creatures all day long  
Rove idle, unemploy'd, and less need rest :  
Man hath his daily work of body or mind  
Appointed, which declares his dignity,  
And the regard of Heaven on all his ways ;  
While other animals unactive range,  
And of their doings God takes no account.”<sup>1</sup>

A very useful and excellent Puritanical exhortation ! This is English virtue and morality ; and at evening, in every family, it can be read to the children like the Bible. Adam is your true paterfamilias, with a vote, an M.P., an old Oxford man, consulted at need by his wife, dealing out to her with prudent measure the scientific explanations which she requires. This night, for instance, the poor lady had a bad dream, and Adam, in his trencher-cap, administers this learned psychological draught :<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, book iv. l. 610-622.

<sup>2</sup> It would be impossible that a man so learned, so argumentative, should spend his whole time in gardening and making up nosegays.

“ Know, that in the soul  
 Are many lesser faculties that serve  
 Reason as chief ; among these Fancy next  
 Her office holds ; of all external things,  
 Which the five watchful senses represent,  
 She forms imaginations, airy shapes  
 Which Reason, joining or disjoining, frames  
 All what we affirm or what deny, and call  
 Our knowledge or opinion. . . .  
 Oft in her absence mimic fancy wakes  
 To imitate her ; but, misjoining shapes,  
 Wild work produces oft, and most in dreams ;  
 Ill matching words and deeds long past or late.”<sup>1</sup>

Here was something to send Eve off to sleep again. Her husband noting the effect, adds like an accredited casuist :

“ Yet be not sad :  
 Evil into the mind of God or man  
 May come and go, so unapproved ; and leave  
 No spot or blame behind.”<sup>2</sup>

We recognise the Protestant husband, his wife's confessor. Next day comes an angel on a visit. Adam tells Eve :

“ Go with speed,  
 And, what thy stores contain, bring forth, and pour  
 Abundance, fit to honour and receive  
 Our heavenly stranger.”<sup>3</sup>

She, like a good housewife, talks about the *menu*, and rather proud of her kitchen-garden, says :

He  
 Beholding shall confess, that here on earth  
 God hath dispensed his bounties as in heaven.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, book v. l. 100-113.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* l. 313-316.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* l. 116-119.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* l. 328-330.

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Mark this becoming zeal of a hospitable lady. She goes "with dispatchful looks, in haste":

"What choice to choose for delicacy best;  
What order, so contrived as not to mix  
Tastes, not well join'd, inelegant; but bring  
Taste after taste upheld with kindest change."<sup>1</sup>

She makes sweet wine, perry, creams; scatters flowers and leaves under the table. What an excellent housewife! What a great many votes she will gain among the country squires, when Adam stands for Parliament. Adam belongs to the Opposition, is a Whig, a Puritan.

He "walks forth; without more train  
Accompanied than with his own complete  
Perfections: in himself was all his state,  
More solemn than the tedious pomp that waits  
On princes, when their rich retinue long  
Of horses led, and grooms beameared with gold,  
Dazzles the crowd."<sup>2</sup>

The epic is changed into a political poem, and we have just heard an epigram against power. The preliminary ceremonies are somewhat long; fortunately, the dishes being uncooked, "no fear lest dinner cool." The angel, though ethereal, eats like a Lincolnshire farmer:

"Nor seemingly  
The angel, nor in mist, the common gloss  
Of theologians; but with keen dispatch  
Of real hunger, and concoctive heat  
To transubstantiate: what redounds, transpires  
Through spirits with ease."<sup>3</sup>

At table Eve listens to the angel's stories, then dis-

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, book v. l. 333-336.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* l. 351-357.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* l. 434-439.

creetly rises at dessert, when they are getting into politics. English ladies may learn by her example to perceive from their lord's faces when they are "entering on studious thoughts abstruse." The sex does not mount so high. A wise lady prefers her husband's talk to that of strangers. "Her husband the relater she prefered." Now Adam hears a little treatise on astronomy. He concludes, like a practical Englishman :

"But to know  
That which before us lies in daily life,  
Is the prime wisdom : what is more, is fume,  
Or emptiness, or fond impertinence ;  
And renders us, in things that most concern,  
Unpractised, unprepared, and still to seek."<sup>1</sup>

The angel gone, Eve, dissatisfied with her garden, wishes to have it improved, and proposes to her husband to work in it, she on one side, he on the other. He says, with an approving smile :

"Nothing lovelier can be found  
In woman, than to study household good,  
And good works in her husband to promote."<sup>2</sup>

But he fears for her, and would keep her at his side. She rebels with a little prick of proud vanity, like a young lady who mayn't go out by herself. She has her way, goes alone and eats the apple. Here interminable speeches come down on the reader, as numerous and cold as winter showers. The speeches of Parliament after Pride's Purge were hardly heavier. The serpent seduces Eve by a collection of arguments worthy of

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, book viii. l. 192-197.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* book ix. l. 232.

the punctilious Chillingworth, and then the syllogistic mist enters her poor brain :

" His forbidding  
Commends thee more, while it infers the good  
By thee communicated, and our want :  
For good unknown sure is not had ; or, had  
And yet unknown, is as not had at all. . . .  
Such prohibitions bind not."<sup>1</sup>

Eve is from Oxford too, has also learned law in the inns about the Temple, and wears, like her husband, the doctor's trencher-cap.

The flow of dissertations never ceases ; from Paradise it gets into heaven : neither heaven nor earth, nor hell itself, would swamp it.

Of all characters which man could bring upon the scene, God is the finest. The cosmogonies of peoples are sublime poems, and the artists' genius does not attain perfection until it is sustained by such conceptions. The Hindoo sacred poems, the Biblical prophecies, the Edda, the Olympus of Hesiod and Homer, the visions of Dante, are glowing flowers from which a whole civilisation blooms, and every emotion vanishes before the terrible feeling through which they have leapt from the bottom of our heart. Nothing then can be more depressing than the degradation of these noble ideas, settling into the regularity of formulas, and under the discipline of a popular worship. What is smaller than a god sunk to the level of a king and a man ? what more repulsive than the Hebrew Jehovah, defined by theological pedantry, governed in his actions by the last manual of doctrine, petrified by literal interpretation ?

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, book ix. l. 753-760.

Milton's Jehovah is a grave king, who maintains a suitable state, something like Charles I. When we meet him for the first time, in Book III., he is holding council, and setting forth a matter of business. From the style we see his grand furred cloak, his pointed Vandyke beard, his velvet-covered throne and golden dais. The business concerns a law which does not act well, and respecting which he desires to justify his rule. Adam is about to eat the apple: why have exposed Adam to the temptation? The royal orator discusses the question, and shows the reason;

“ I made him just and right,  
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.  
Such I created all the ethereal powers  
And spirits, both them who stood and them who fail'd. . . .  
Not free, what proof could they have given sincere  
Of true allegiance, constant faith, or love?  
Where only, what they needs must do, appear'd,  
Not what they would: what praise could they receive?  
What pleasure I from such obedience paid?  
When will and reason (reason also is choice),  
Useless and vain, of freedom both despoil'd,  
Made passive both, had served necessity,  
Not me. They therefore, as to right belong'd,  
So were created, nor can justly accuse  
Their Maker, or their making, or their fate;  
As if predestination over-ruled  
Their will, disposed by absolute decree  
Or high foreknowledge: they themselves decreed  
Their own revolt, not I: if I foreknew,  
Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,  
Which had no less proved certain unforeknown.  
So without least impulse or shadow of fate,  
Or aught by me immutably foreseen,

They trespass, authors to themselves in all,  
Both what they judge and what they choose.”<sup>1</sup>

The modern reader is not so patient as the Thrones, Seraphim, and Dominations ; this is why I stop half-way in the royal speech. We perceive that Milton’s Jehovah is connected with the theologian James I., versed in the arguments of Arminians and Gomarists, very clever at the *distinguo*, and, before all, incomparably tedious. He must pay his councillors of state very well if he wishes them to listen to such tirades. His son answers him respectfully in the same style. Goethe’s God, half abstraction, half legend, source of calm oracles, a vision just beheld after a pyramid of ecstatic strophes,<sup>2</sup> greatly excels this Miltonic God, a business man, a schoolmaster, an ostentatious man ! I honour him too much in giving him these titles. He deserves a worse name, when he sends Raphael to warn Adam that Satan intends him some mischief :

“ This let him know,  
Lest, wilfully transgressing, he pretend  
Surprisal, unadmonish’d, unforwarn’d.”<sup>3</sup>

This Miltonic Deity is only a schoolmaster, who, foreseeing the fault of his pupil, tells him beforehand the grammar rule, so as to have the pleasure of scolding him without discussion. Moreover, like a good politician, he had a second motive, just as with his angels, “ For state, as Sovran King ; and to inure our prompt obedience.” The word is out ; we see what Milton’s heaven is : a Whitehall filled with bedizened footmen. The

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, book iii. l. 98-128.

<sup>2</sup> End of the continuation of *Faust*. *Prologus in Heaven*.

<sup>3</sup> *Paradise Lost*, book v. l. 242.

angels are the choristers, whose business is to sing cantatas about the king and before the king, keeping their places as long as they obey, alternating all night long to sing “ melodious hymns about the sovran throne.” What a life for this poor king ! and what a cruel condition, to hear eternally his own praises !<sup>1</sup> To amuse himself, Milton’s Deity decides to crown his son king—partner-king, if you prefer it. Read the passage, and say if it be not a ceremony of his time that the poet describes :

“ Ten thousand thousand ensigns high advanced,  
 Standards and gonfalons ’twixt van and rear  
 Stream in the air, and for distinction serve  
 Of hierarchies, of orders, and degrees ;  
 Or in their glittering tissues bear imblazèd  
 Holy memorials, acts of zeal and love  
 Recorded eminent ; ”<sup>2</sup>

doubtless the capture of a Dutch vessel, the defeat of the Spaniards in the Downs. The king brings forward his son, “ anoints ” him, declares him “ his great vice-gerent : ”

“ To him shall bow  
 All knees in heaven. . . . Him who disobeys,  
 Me disobeys ; ”<sup>3</sup>

and such were, in fact, expelled from heaven the same

<sup>1</sup> We are reminded of the history of Ira in Voltaire, condemned to hear without intermission or end the praises of four chamberlains, and the following hymn :

“ Que son mérite est extrême !  
 Que de grâces, que de grandeur.  
 Ah ! combien monseigneur  
 Doit être content de lui-même !

<sup>2</sup> *Puritan Lost*, book v. l. 588-594.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid. l. 607-612.*

day. "All seem'd well pleased ; all seem'd, but were not all." Yet

"That day, as other solemn days, they spent  
In song and dance about the sacred hill. . . .  
Forthwith from dance to sweet repeat they turn  
Desirous."<sup>1</sup>

Milton describes the tables, the dishes, the wine, the vessels. It is a popular festival ; I miss the fireworks, the bell-ringing, as in London, and I can fancy that all would drink to the health of the new king. Then Satan revolts ; he takes his troops to the other end of the country, like Lambert or Monk, toward "the quarters of the north," Scotland perhaps, passing through well-governed districts, "empires," with their sheriffs and lord-lieutenants. Heaven is partitioned off like a good map. Satan holds forth before his officers against royalty, opposes in a word-combat the good royalist Abdiel, who refutes his "blasphemous, false, and proud" arguments, and quits him to rejoin his prince at Oxford. Well armed, the rebel marches with his pikemen and artillery to attack the fortress.<sup>2</sup> The two parties slash each other with the sword, mow each other down with cannon, knock each other down with political arguments. These sorry angels have their mind as well disciplined as their limbs ; they have passed their

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, book v. l. 617-631.

<sup>2</sup> The Miltonic Deity is so much on the level of a king and man, that he uses (with irony certainly) words like these :

"Lest unawares we lose

This our high place, our Sanctuary, our Hill."

His son, about to flesh his maiden sword, replies :

"If I be found the worst in heaven," etc.

Book v. 731-742.

youth in a class of logic and in a drill school. Satan holds forth like a preacher :

“ What heaven’s Lord had powerfulest to send  
Against us from about his throne, and judged  
Sufficient to subdue us to his will,  
But proves not so : then fallible, it seems,  
Of future we may deem him, though till now  
Omniscient thought.”<sup>1</sup>

He also talks like a drill-sergeant. “ Vanguard, to right and left the front unfold.” He makes quips as clumsy as those of Garrison, the former butcher turned officer. What a heaven ! It is enough to disgust a man with Paradise ; any one would rather enter Charles I.’s troop of lackeys, or Cromwell’s Ironsides. We have orders of the day, a hierarchy, exact submission, extra-duties, disputes, regulated ceremonials, prostrations, etiquette, furbished arms, arsenals, depots of chariots and ammunition. Was it worth while leaving earth to find in heaven carriage-works, buildings, artillery, a manual of tactics, the art of salutations, and the *Almanac de Gotha* ? Are these the things which “ eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath entered into the heart to conceive ? ” What a gap between this monarchical frippery <sup>2</sup> and the visions of Dante, the souls floating like stars amid the harmonies, the mingled splendours, the mystic roses radiating and vanishing in the azure, the impalpable world in which

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, book vi. l. 425-430.

<sup>2</sup> When Raphael comes on earth, the angels who are “ under watch, ” “ in honour rise.” The disagreeable and characteristic feature of this heaven is, that the universal motive is obedience, while in Dante’s it is love. “ Lowly reverent they bow. . . . Our happy state we hold, like yours, while our obedience holds.”

all the laws of earthly life are dissolved, the unfathomable abyss traversed by fleeting visions, like golden bees gliding in the rays of the deep central sun ! Is it not a sign of extinguished imagination, of the inroad of prose, of the birth of practical genius, replacing metaphysics by morality ? What a fall ! To measure it, read a true Christian poem, the *Apocalypse*. I copy half-a-dozen verses ; think what it has become in the hands of the imitator :

“ And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks ;

“ And in the midst of the seven candlesticks, one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.

“ His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow ; and his eyes were as a flame of fire ;

“ And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace ; and his voice as the sound of many waters.

“ And he had in his right hand seven stars : and out of his mouth went a sharp two edged sword : and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

“ And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead.”<sup>1</sup>

When Milton was arranging his celestial show, he did not fall as dead.

But if the innate and inveterate habits of logical argument, joined with the literal theology of the time, prevented him from attaining to lyrical illusion or from creating living souls, the splendour of his grand imagination, combined with the passions of Puritanism, furnished him with an heroic character, several sublime hymns, and scenery which no one has surpassed. The finest

<sup>1</sup> Rev. i. 12

thing in connection with this Paradise is hell ; and in this history of God, the chief part is taken by the devil. The ridiculous devil of the middle-age, a horned enchanter, a dirty jester, a petty and mischievous ape, band-leader to a rabble of old women, has become a giant and a hero. Like a conquered and banished Cromwell, he remains admired and obeyed by those whom he has drawn into the abyss. If he continues master, it is because he deserves it ; firmer, more enterprising, more scheming than the rest, it is always from him that deep counsels, unlooked-for resources, courageous deeds, proceed. It was he who invented "deep-throated engines . . . disgorging, . . . chained thunderbolts, and hail of iron globes," and won the second day's victory ; he who in hell roused his dejected troops, and planned the ruin of man ; he who, passing the guarded gates and the boundless chaos, amid so many dangers, and across so many obstacles, made man revolt against God, and gained for hell the whole posterity of the new-born. Though defeated, he prevails, since he has won from the monarch on high the third part of his angels, and almost all the sons of his Adam. Though wounded, he triumphs, for the thunder which smote his head left his heart invincible. Though feebler in force, he remains superior in nobility, since he prefers suffering independence to happy servility, and welcomes his defeat and his torments as a glory, a liberty, and a joy. These are the proud and sombre political passions of the constant though oppressed Puritans ; Milton had felt them in the vicissitudes of war, and the emigrants who had taken refuge amongst the wild beasts and savages of America, found them strong and energetic in the depths of their hearts.

“Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,  
 Said then the lost Archangel, this the seat  
 That we must change for heaven ? this mournful gloom  
 For that celestial light ? Be it so, since he,  
 Who now is Sovran, can dispose and bid  
 What shall be right : farthest from him is best,  
 Whom reason has equal’d, force hath made supreme  
 Above his equals. Farewell, happy fields,  
 Where joy for ever dwells ! Hail, horrors ; hail,  
 Infernal world ! and thou, profoundest hell,  
 Receive thy new possessor ; one who brings  
 A mind not to be changed by place or time.  
 The mind is its own place, and in itself  
 Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.  
 What matter where, if I be still the same,  
 And what I should be ; all but less than he  
 Whom thunder hath made greater ? Here at least  
 We shall be free ; the Almighty hath not built  
 Here for his envy ; will not drive us hence :  
 Here we may reign secure ; and in my choice  
 To reign is worth ambition, though in hell :  
 Better to reign in hell, than serve in heaven.”<sup>1</sup>

This sombre heroism, this harsh obstinacy, this biting irony, these proud stiff arms which clasp grief as a mistress, this concentration of invincible courage which, cast on its own resources, finds everything in itself, this power of passion and sway over passion.—

“The unconquerable will,  
 And study of revenge, immortal hate,  
 And courage never to submit or yield,  
 And what is else not to be overcome,”<sup>2</sup>

are features proper to the English character and to

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, book i. l. 242-268.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* l. 106-108.

English literature, and you will find them later on in Byron's *Lara* and *Conrad*.

Around the fallen angel, as within him, all is great. Dante's hell is but a hall of tortures, whose cells, one below another, descend to the deepest wells. Milton's hell is vast and vague.

“A dungeon horrible on all sides round  
As one great furnace flamed, yet from those flames  
No light, but rather darkness visible  
Served only to discover sights of woe,  
Regions of sorrow, doleful shades.<sup>1</sup> . . .

Beyond this flood a frozen continent  
Lies dark and wild, beat with perpetual storms  
Of whirlwind and dire hail, which on firm land  
Thaws not, but gathers heap, and ruin seems  
Of ancient pile.”<sup>2</sup>

The angels gather, innumerable legions :

“As when heaven's fire  
Hath scathed the forest oaks or mountain pines,  
With singed top their stately growth, though bare,  
Stands on the blasted heath.”<sup>3</sup>

Milton needs the grand and infinite ; he lavishes them. His eyes are only content in limitless space, and he produces colossal figures to fill it. Such is Satan wallowing on the surges of the livid sea :

“In bulk as huge . . . as . . . that sea-beast  
Leviathan, which God of all his works  
Created hugest that swim the ocean stream :  
Him, haply, slumbering on the Norway foam,

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, book i. l. 61-65.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* book ii. l. 587-591.      <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* book i. l. 612-615.

The pilot of some small night-founder'd skiff,  
Deeming some island, oft, as seamen tell,  
With fixed anchor in his scaly rind  
Moors by his side under the lee, while night  
Invests the sea, and wished morn delays."<sup>1</sup>

Spenser has discovered images just as fine, but he has not the tragic gravity which the idea of hell impresses on a Protestant. No poetic creation equals in horror and grandeur the spectacle that greeted Satan on leaving his dungeon :

" At last appear  
Hell bounds, high reaching to the horrid roof,  
And thrice threefold the gates ; three folds were brass,  
Three iron, three of adamantine rock,  
Impenetrable, impaled with circling fire,  
Yet unconsumed. Before the gates there sat  
On either side a formidable shape ;  
The one seem'd woman to the waist, and fair,  
But ended foul in many a scaly fold  
Voluminous and vast, a serpent arm'd  
With mortal sting : about her middle round  
A cry of hell hounds never ceasing bark'd  
With wide Cerberean mouths full loud, and rung  
A hideous peal : yet, when they list, would creep,  
If aught disturb'd their noise, into her womb,  
And kennel there ; yet there still bark'd and howl'd  
Within unseen. . . . The other shape,  
If shape it might be call'd, that shape had none  
Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb,  
Or substance might be call'd that shadow seem'd,  
For each seem'd either : black it stood as night,  
Fierce as ten furies, terrible as hell,  
And shook a dreadful dart ; what seem'd his head

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, book i. l. 196-208.

The likeness of a kingly crown had on.  
Satan was now at hand, and from his seat  
The monster moving onward came as fast,  
With horrid strides ; hell trembled as he strode.  
The undaunted fiend what this might be admired,  
Admired, not fear'd."<sup>1</sup>

The heroic glow of the old soldier of the Civil Wars  
animates the infernal battle ; and if anyone were to  
ask why Milton creates things greater than other men,  
I should answer, because he has a greater heart.

Hence the sublimity of his scenery. If I did not  
fear the paradox, I should say that this scenery was a  
school of virtue. Spenser is a smooth glass, which fills  
us with calm images. Shakspeare is a burning mirror,  
which overpowers us, repeatedly, with multiplied and  
dazzling visions. The one distracts, the other disturbs  
us. Milton raises our mind. The force of the objects  
which he describes passes into us ; we become great  
by sympathy with their greatness. Such is the effect  
of his description of the Creation. The calm and  
creative command of the Messiah leaves its trace in  
the heart which listens to it, and we feel more vigour  
and moral health at the sight of this great work of  
wisdom and will :

"On heavenly ground they stood ; and from the shore  
They view'd the vast immeasurable abyss  
Outrageous as a sea, dark, wasteful, wild,  
Up from the bottom turn'd by furious winds  
And surging waves, as mountains, to assault  
Heaven's hight, and with the centre mix the pola.  
'Silence, ye troubled waves, and thou deep, peace,'  
Said then the omnific Word : 'your discord end !' . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, book ii. l. 643-678.

Let there be light, said God ; and forthwith light  
Ethereal, first of things, quintessence pure,  
Sprung from the deep ; and from her native east  
To journey through the aery gloom began,  
Sphered in a radiant cloud. . . .  
The earth was form'd ; but in the womb as yet  
Of waters, embryon immature involved,  
Appear'd not : over all the face of earth  
Main ocean flow'd, not idle, but, with warm  
Prolific humour softening all her globe,  
Fermented the great mother to conceive,  
Satiate with genial moisture, when God said,  
'Be gather'd now, ye waters under heaven,  
Into one place, and let dry land appear.'  
Immediately the mountains huge appear  
Emergent, and their broad bare backs upheave  
Into the clouds, their tops ascend the sky :  
So high as heaved the tumid hills, so low  
Down sunk a hollow bottom broad and deep,  
Capacious bed of waters : thither they  
Hasted with glad precipitance, uproll'd,  
As drops on dust conglobing from the dry."<sup>1</sup>

This is primitive scenery ; immense bare seas and mountains, as Raphael Sanzio outlines them in the background of his biblical paintings. Milton embraces the general effects, and handles the whole as easily as his Jehovah.

Let us quit superhuman and fanciful spectacles. A simple sunset equals them. Milton peoples it with solemn allegories and regal figures, and the sublime is born in the poet, as just before it was born from the subject :—

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, book vii. l. 210-292.

“ The sun, now fallen . . .  
 Arraying with reflected purple and gold  
 The clouds that on his western throne attend :  
 Now came still evening on, and twilight gray  
 Had in her sober livery all things clad ;  
 Silence accompanied, for beast and bird,  
 They to their grassy couch, these to their nests,  
 Were slunk, all but the wakeful nightingale ;  
 She all night long her amorous descant sung ;  
 Silence was pleased : now glowed the firmament  
 With living sapphires : Hesperus, that led  
 The starry host, rode brightest, till the moon,  
 Rising in clouded majesty, at length,  
 Apparent queen, unveiled her peerless light,  
 And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw.”<sup>1</sup>

The changes of the light become here a religious procession of vague beings who fill the soul with veneration. So sanctified, the poet prays. Standing by the “inmost bower” of Adam and Eve, he says:—

“ Hail wedded love, mysterious law, true source  
 Of human offspring, sole property  
 In Paradise of all things common else !  
 By thee adulterous lust was driven from men  
 Among the bestial herds to range by thee,  
 Founded in reason, loyal, just, and pure,  
 Relations dear, and all the charities  
 Of father, son, and brother, first were known.”<sup>2</sup>

He justifies it by the example of saints and patriarchs. He immolates before it “the bought smile” and “court-amours, mix’d dance, or wanton mask, or midnight ball, or serenate.” We are a thousand miles from Shakspeare; and in this Protestant eulogy of the

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, book iv. l. 591-609.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid. l. 750-757.*

family tie, of lawful love, of "domestic sweets," of orderly piety and of home, we perceive a new literature and an altered time.

A strange great man, and a strange spectacle! He was born with the instinct of noble things; and this instinct, strengthened in him by solitary meditation, by accumulated knowledge, by stern logic, becomes changed into a body of maxims and beliefs which no temptation could dissolve, and no reverse shake. Thus fortified, he passes life as a combatant, as a poet, with courageous deeds and splendid dreams, heroic and rude, chimerical and impassioned, generous and calm, like every self-contained reasoner, like every enthusiast, insensible to experience and enamoured of the beautiful. Thrown by the chance of a revolution into politics and theology, he demands for others the liberty which his powerful reason requires, and strikes at the public fetters which impede his personal energy. By the force of his intellect, he is more capable than any one of accumulating science; by the force of his enthusiasm, he is more capable than any of experiencing hatred. Thus armed, he throws himself into controversy with all the clumsiness and barbarism of the time; but this proud logic displays its arguments with a marvellous breadth, and sustains its images with an unwonted majesty: this lofty imagination, after having spread over his prose an array of magnificent figures, carries him into a torrent of passion even to the height of the sublime or excited ode—a sort of archangel's song of adoration or vengeance. The chance of a throne preserved, then re-established, led him, before the revolution took place, into pagan and moral poetry, after the revolution into Christian and moral verse.

In both he aims at the sublime, and inspires admiration ; because the sublime is the work of enthusiastic reason, and admiration is the enthusiasm of reason. In both, he arrives at his point by the accumulation of splendours, by the sustained fulness of poetic song, by the greatness of his allegories, the loftiness of his sentiments, the description of infinite objects and heroic emotions. In the first, a lyrist and a philosopher, with a wider poetic freedom, and the creator of a stronger poetic illusion, he produces almost perfect odes and choruses. In the second, an epic writer and a Protestant, enslaved by a strict theology, robbed of the style which makes the supernatural visible, deprived of the dramatic sensibility which creates varied and living souls, he accumulates cold dissertations, transforms man and God into orthodox and vulgar machines, and only regains his genius in endowing Satan with his republican soul, in multiplying grand landscapes and colossal apparitions, in consecrating his poetry to the praise of religion and duty.

Placed, as it happened, between two ages, he participates in their two characters, as a stream which, flowing between two different soils, is tinged by both their hues. A poet and a Protestant, he receives from the closing age the free poetic afflatus, and from the opening age the severe political religion. He employed the one in the service of the other, and displayed the old inspiration in new subjects. In his works we recognise two Englands : one impassioned for the beautiful, devoted to the emotions of an unshackled sensibility and the fancies of pure imagination, with no law but the natural feelings, and no religion but natural belief; willingly pagan, often immoral ; such

as it is exhibited by Ben Jonson, Beaumont, Fletcher, Shakspeare, Spenser, and the superb harvest of poets which covered the ground for a space of fifty years; the other fortified by a practical religion, void of metaphysical invention, altogether political worshipping rule, attached to measured, sensible, useful, narrow opinions, praising the virtues of the family, armed and stiffened by a rigid morality, driven into prose, raised to the highest degree of power, wealth, and liberty. In this sense, this style and these ideas are monuments of history; they concentrate, recall, or anticipate the past and the future; and in the limits of a single work are found the events and the feelings of several centuries and of a whole nation.

## BOOK III THE CLASSIC AGE

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### CHAPTER I

#### *The Restoration.*

##### 1. THE ROISTERERS.

WHEN we alternately look at the works of the court painters of Charles I. and Charles II., and pass from the noble portraits of Van Dyck to the figures of Lely, the fall is sudden and great ; we have left a palace, and we light on a bagnio.

Instead of the proud and dignified lords, at once cavaliers and courtiers, instead of those high-born yet simple ladies who look at the same time princesses and modest maidens, instead of that generous and heroic company, elegant and resplendent, in whom the spirit of the Renaissance yet survived, but who already displayed the refinement of the modern age, we are confronted by perilous and importunate courtesans, with an expression either vile or harsh, incapable of shame or of remorse.<sup>1</sup> Their plump smooth hands toy

<sup>1</sup> See especially the portraits of Lady Morland, Lady Williams, the countess of Ossory, the Duchess of Cleveland, Lady Price, and many others.

fondlingly with dimpled fingers; ringlets of heavy hair fall on their bare shoulders; their swimming eyes languish voluptuously; an insipid smile hovers on their sensual lips. One is lifting a mass of dishevelled hair which streams over the curves of her rosy flesh; another falls down with languor, and uncloses a sleeve whose soft folds display the full whiteness of her arms. Nearly all are half-draped; many of them seem to be just rising from their beds; the rumpled dressing-gown clings to the neck, and looks as though it were soiled by a night's debauch; the tumbled under-garment slips down to the hips: their feet tread the bright and glossy silk. With bosoms uncovered, they are decked out in all the luxurious extravagance of prostitutes; diamond girdles, puffs of lace, the vulgar splendour of gilding, a superfluity of embroidered and rustling fabrics, enormous head-dresses, the curls and fringes of which, rolled up and sticking out, compel notice by the very height of their shameless magnificence. Folding curtains hang round them in the shape of an alcove, and the eyes penetrate through a vista into the recesses of a wide park, whose solitude will not ill serve the purpose of their pleasures.

## I.

All this came by way of contrast; Puritanism had brought on an orgie, and fanatics had talked down virtue. For many years the gloomy English imagination, possessed by religious terrors, had desolated the life of men. Conscience had become disturbed at the thought of death and dark eternity; half-expressed doubts stealthily swarmed within like a bed of thorns, and the sick heart, starting at every motion, had ended by

taking a disgust at all its pleasures, and abhorred all its natural instincts. Thus poisoned at its very beginning, the divine sentiment of justice became a mournful madness. Man, confessedly perverse and condemned, believed himself pent in a prison-house of perdition and vice, into which no effort and no chance could dart a ray of light, except a hand from above should come by free grace, to rend the sealed stone of this tomb. Men lived the life of the condemned, amid torments and anguish, oppressed by a gloomy despair, haunted by spectres. People would frequently imagine themselves at the point of death ; Cromwell himself, according to Dr. Simcott, physician in Huntingdon, "had fancies about the Town Cross;"<sup>1</sup> some would feel within them the motions of an evil spirit ; one and all passed the night with their eyes glued to the tales of blood and the impassioned appeals of the Old Testament, listening to the threats and thunders of a terrible God, and renewing in their own hearts the ferocity of murderers and the exaltation of seers. Under such a strain reason gradually left them. They continually were seeking after the Lord, and found but a dream. After long hours of exhaustion, they laboured under a warped and overwrought imagination. Dazzling forms, unwonted ideas, sprang up on a sudden in their heated brain ; these men were raised and penetrated by extraordinary emotions. So transformed, they knew themselves no longer ; they did not ascribe to themselves these violent and sudden inspirations which were forced upon them, which compelled them to leave the beaten tracks, which had no connection one with another, which shook and enlightened them when least expected, without being able

<sup>1</sup> Oliver Cromwell's *Letters and Speeches*, ed. by Carlyle, 1866, i. 39.—  
Tr.

either to check or to govern them ; they saw in them the agency of a supernatural power, and gave themselves up to it with the enthusiasm of madness and the stubbornness of faith.

To crown all, fanaticism had become an institution ; the sectary had laid down all the steps of mental transfiguration, and reduced the encroachment of his dream to a theory : he set about methodically to drive out reason and enthroned ecstasy. George Fox wrote its history, Bunyan gave it its laws, Parliament presented an example of it, all the pulpits lauded its practice. Artisans, soldiers, women discussed it, mastered it, excited one another by the details of their experience and the publicity of their exaltations. A new life was inaugurated which had blighted and excluded the old. All secular tastes were suppressed, all sensual joys forbidden ; the spiritual man alone remained standing upon the ruins of the past, and the heart, debarred from all its natural safety-valves, could only direct its views or aspirations towards a sinister Deity. The typical Puritan walked slowly along the streets, his eyes raised towards heaven, with elongated features, yellow and haggard, with closely cropt hair, clad in brown or black, unadorned, clothed only to cover his nakedness. If a man had round cheeks, he passed for lukewarm.<sup>1</sup> The whole body, the exterior, the very tone of voice, all must wear the sign of penitence and divine grace. A Puritan spoke slowly, with a solemn and somewhat nasal tone of voice, as if to destroy the vivacity of conversation and the melody of the natural voice. His speech stuffed with scriptural quotations, his style borrowed from the prophets, his name and the

<sup>1</sup> Colonel Hutchinson was at one time held in suspicion because he wore long hair and dressed well.

names of his children drawn from the Bible, bore witness that his thoughts were confined to the terrible world of the seers and ministers of divine vengeance. From within, the contagion spread outwards. The fears of conscience were converted into laws of the state. Personal asceticism grew into public tyranny. The Puritan proscribed pleasure as an enemy, for others as well as for himself. Parliament closed the gambling-houses and theatres, and had the actors whipped at the cart's tail ; oaths were fined ; the May-trees were cut down ; the bears, whose fights amused the people, were put to death ; the plaster of Puritan masons reduced nude statues to decency ; the beautiful poetic festivals were forbidden. Fines and corporal punishments shut out, even from children, games, dancing, bell-ringing, rejoicings, junketings, wrestling, the chase, all exercises and amusements which might profane the Sabbath. The ornaments, pictures, and statues in the churches were pulled down or mutilated. The only pleasure which they retained and permitted was the singing of psalms through the nose, the edification of long sermons, the excitement of acrimonious controversies, the harsh and sombre joy of a victory gained over the enemy of mankind, and of the tyranny exercised against the demon's supposed abettors. In Scotland, a colder and sterner land, intolerance reached the utmost limits of ferocity and pettiness, instituting a surveillance over the private life and home devotions of every member of a family, depriving Catholics of their children, imposing the abjuration of Popery under pain of perpetual imprisonment or death, dragging crowds of witches<sup>1</sup> to the

<sup>1</sup> 1648 ; thirty in one day. One of them confessed that she had been at a gathering of more than five hundred witches.

stake.<sup>1</sup> It seemed as though a black cloud had weighed down the life of man, drowning all light, wiping out all beauty, extinguishing all joy, pierced here and there by the glitter of the sword and by the flickering of torches, beneath which one might perceive the indistinct forms of gloomy despots, of bilious sectarians, of silent victims.

## II.

After the Restoration a deliverance ensued. Like a checked and choked up stream, public opinion dashed with all its natural force and all its acquired momentum, into the bed from which it had been debarred. The

<sup>1</sup> In 1652, the kirk-session of Glasgow "brot boyes and servants before them, for breaking the sabbath, and other faulta. They had clandestine censors, and gave money to some for this end."—Note 28, taken from *Wodrow's Analecta*; Buckle, *History of Civilization in England*, 3 vols. 1867, iii. 208.

Even early in the eighteenth century, "the most popular divines" in Scotland affirmed that Satan "frequently appears clothed in a corporeal substance."—*Ibid.* iii. 233, note 76, taken from *Memoirs of C. L. Lences*.

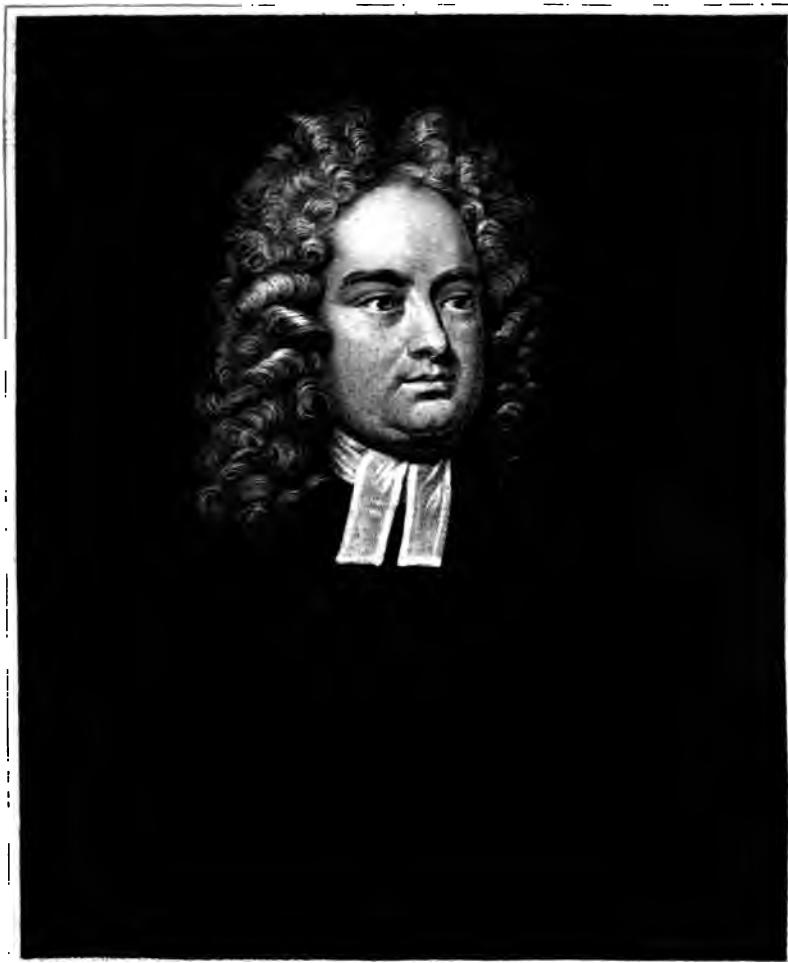
"No husband shall kiss his wife, and no mother shall kiss her child on the Sabbath day."—Note 135. *Ibid.* iii. 253; from Rev. C. J. Lyon's *St. Andrews*, vol. i. 458, with regard to government of a colony. [It would have been satisfactory if Mr. Lyon had given his authority.]—TR.

"(Sept. 22, 1649) The quhilk day the Sessioun caused mak this act, that ther shoule be no pypers at brydels," etc.—*Ibid.* iii. 258, note 158. In 1719, the Presbytery of Edinburgh indignantly declares: "Yea, some have arrived at that height of impiety, as not to be ashamed of washing in waters, and swimming in rivers upon the holy Sabbath."—Note 187. *Ibid.* iii. 266.

"I think David had never so sweet a time as then, when he was pursued as a partridge by his son Absalom."—Note 190. Gray's *Great and Precious Promises*.

See the whole of Chapter iii. vol. iii., in which Buckle has described, by similar quotations, the condition of Scotland, chiefly in the seventeenth century.





*JONATHAN SWIFT*



outburst carried away the dams. The violent return to the senses drowned morality. Virtue had the semblance of Puritanism. Duty and fanaticism became mingled in common disrepute. In this great reaction, devotion and honesty, swept away together, left to mankind but the wreck and the mire. The more excellent parts of human nature disappeared ; there remained but the animal, without bridle or guide, urged by his desires beyond justice and shame.

When we see these manners through the medium of a Hamilton or a Saint-Évremond, we can tolerate them. Their French varnish deceives us. Debauchery in a Frenchman is only half disgusting ; with him, if the animal breaks loose, it is without abandoning itself to excess. The foundation is not, as with the Englishman, coarse and powerful. You may break the glittering ice which covers him, without bringing down upon yourself the swollen and muddy torrent that roars beneath his neighbour ;<sup>1</sup> the stream which will issue from it will only have its petty dribblings, and will return quickly and of itself to its accustomed channel. The Frenchman is mild, naturally refined, little inclined for great or gross sensuality, liking a sober style of talk, easily armed against filthy manners by his delicacy and good taste. The Count de Grammont has too much wit to love an orgie. After all an orgie is not pleasant ; the breaking of glasses, brawling, lewd talk, excess in eating and drinking,—there is nothing in this very tempting to a rather delicate taste : the Frenchman, after Grammont's type, is born an epicurean, not a glutton or a drunkard. What he seeks is amusement, not unre-

<sup>1</sup> See, in Richardson, Swift, and Fielding, but particularly in Hogarth, the delineation of brutish debauchery.

strained joy or bestial pleasure. I know full well that he is not without reproach. I would not trust him with my purse, he forgets too readily the distinction between *meum* and *tuum*; above all, I would not trust him with my wife: he is not over-delicate; his escapades at the gambling-table and with women smack too much of the sharper and the briber. But I am wrong to use these big words in connection with him; they are too weighty, they crush so delicate and so pretty a specimen of humanity. These heavy habits of honour or shame can only be worn by serious-minded men, and Grammont takes nothing seriously, neither his fellowmen, nor himself, nor vice, nor virtue. To pass his time agreeably is his sole endeavour. "They had said good-bye to dulness in the army," observed Hamilton, "as soon as he was there." That is his pride and his aim; he troubles himself, and cares for nothing beside. His valet robs him; another would have brought the rogue to the gallows; but the theft was clever, and he keeps his rascal. He left England forgetting to marry the girl he was betrothed to; he is caught at Dover; he returns and marries her: this was an amusing *contre-temps*; he asks for nothing better. One day, being penniless, he fleeces the Count de Caméran at play. "Could Grammont, after the figure he had once cut, pack off like any common fellow? By no means; he is a man of feeling; he will maintain the honour of France." He covers his cheating at play with a joke; in reality, his notions of property are not over-clear. He regales Caméran with Caméran's own money; would Caméran have acted better or otherwise? What matter if his money be in Grammont's purse or his own? The main point is gained, since there is pleasure in getting the

money, and there is pleasure in spending it. The hateful and the ignoble vanish from such a life. If he pays his court to princes, you may be sure it is not on his knees; so lively a soul is not weighed down by respect, his wit places him on a level with the greatest; under pretext of amusing the king, he tells him plain truths.<sup>1</sup> If he finds himself in London, surrounded by open debauchery, he does not plunge into it; he passes through on tiptoe, and so daintily that the mire does not stick to him. We do not recognise any longer in his anecdotes the anguish and the brutality which were really felt at that time; the narrative flows on quickly, raising a smile, then another, and another yet, so that the whole mind is brought by an adroit and easy progress to something like good humour. At table, Grammont will never stuff himself; at play, he will never grow violent; with his mistress, he will never give vent to coarse talk; in a duel, he will not hate his adversary. The wit of a Frenchman is like French wine; it makes men neither brutal, nor wicked, nor gloomy. Such is the spring of these pleasures: a supper will destroy neither delicacy, nor good nature, nor enjoyment. The libertine remains sociable, polite, obliging; his gaiety culminates only in the gaiety of others;<sup>2</sup> he is attentive to them as naturally as to himself; and in addition, he is ever on the alert and intelligent: repartees, flashes of brilliancy, witticisms,

<sup>1</sup> The king was playing at backgammon; a doubtful throw occurs: "Ah, here is Grammont, who'll decide for us; Grammont, come and decide." "Sire, you have lost." "What: you do not yet know. . . . "Ah, Sire, if the throw had been merely doubtful, these gentlemen would not have failed to say you had won."

<sup>2</sup> Hamilton says of Grammont, "He sought out the unfortunate only to succour them."

sparkle on his lips ; he can think at table and in company, sometimes better than if alone or fasting. It is clear that with him debauchery does not extinguish the man ; Grammont would say that it perfects him ; that wit, the heart, the senses, only arrive at excellence and true enjoyment, amid the elegance and animation of a choice supper.

## III.

It is quite the contrary in England. When we scratch the covering of an Englishman's morality, the brute appears in its violence and its deformity. One of the English statesmen said that with the French an unchained mob could be led by words of humanity and honour,<sup>1</sup> but that in England it was necessary, in order to appease them, to throw to them raw flesh. Insults, blood, orgie, that is the food on which the mob of noblemen, under Charles II., precipitated itself. All that excuses a carnival was absent ; and, in particular, wit. Three years after the return of the king, Butler published his *Hudibras* ; and with what *éclat* his contemporaries only could tell, while the echo of applause is kept up even to our own days. How low is the wit, with what awkwardness and dulness he dilutes his revengeful satire. Here and there lurks a happy picture, the remnant of a poetry which has just perished ; but the whole work reminds one of a Scarron, as unworthy as the other, and more malignant. It is written, people say, on the model of *Don Quixote* ; *Hudibras* is a Puritan knight, who goes about, like his antitype, redressing wrongs, and pocketing beatings. It would be truer to say that it

<sup>1</sup> This saying sounds strange after the horrors of the Commune.—Tr.

resembles the wretched imitation of Avellaneda.<sup>1</sup> The short metre, well suited to buffoonery, hobbles along without rest and limpingly, floundering in the mud which it delights in, as foul and as dull as that of the *Entide Travestie*.<sup>2</sup> The description of Hudibras and his horse occupies the best part of a canto ; forty lines are taken up by describing his beard, forty more by describing his breeches. Endless scholastic discussions, arguments as long as those of the Puritans, spread their wastes and briars over half the poem. No action, no simplicity, all is would-be satire and gross caricature ; there is neither art, nor harmony, nor good taste to be found in it ; the Puritan style is converted into an absurd gibberish ; and the engalled rancour, missing its aim by its mere excess, spoils the portrait it wishes to draw. Would you believe that such a writer gives himself airs, wishes to enliven us, pretends to be funny ? What delicate raillery is there in this picture of Hudibras' beard !

“ His tawny beard was th’ equal grace  
 Both of his wisdom and his face ;  
 In cut and die so like a tile,  
 A sudden view it would beguile :  
 The upper part whereof was whey,  
 The nether orange, mix’d with grey.  
 This hairy meteor did denounce  
 The fall of sceptres and of crowns :

<sup>1</sup> A Spanish author, who continued and imitated Cervantes' *Don Quixote*.

<sup>2</sup> A work by Scarron. *Hudibras*, ed. Z. Grey, 1801, 2 vola., i. canto i. l. 289, says also :

“ For as *Aeneas* bore his sire  
 Upon his shoulders through the fire,  
 Our knight did bear no less a pack  
 Of his own buttocks on his back.

With grisly type did represent  
 Declining age of government,  
 And tell with hieroglyphic spade  
 Its own grave and the state's were made.”<sup>1</sup>

Butler is so well satisfied with his insipid fun, that he prolongs it for a good many lines :

“ Like Samson's heart-breakers, it grew  
 In time to make a nation rue ;  
 Tho' it contributed its own fall,  
 To wait upon the public downfall. . . .  
 'Twas bound to suffer persecution  
 And martyrdom with resolution ;  
 T' oppose itself against the hate  
 And vengeance of the incens'd state,  
 In whose defiance it was worn,  
 Still ready to be pull'd and torn,  
 With red-hot irons to be tortur'd,  
 Revil'd, and spit upon, and martyr'd.  
 Maugre all which, 'twas to stand fast  
 As long as monarchy should last ;  
 But when the state should hap to reel,  
 'Twas to submit to fatal steel,  
 And fall, as it was consecrate,  
 A sacrifice to fall of state,  
 Whose thread of life the fatal sisters  
 Did twist together with its whiskers,  
 And twine so close, that time should never,  
 In life or death, their fortunes sever ;  
 But with his rusty sickle mow  
 Both down together at a blow.”<sup>2</sup>

The nonsense increases as we go on. Could any one have taken pleasure in humour such as this?—

<sup>1</sup> *Hudibras*, part i. canto i. l. 241-250.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* l. 253-280.

“ This sword a dagger had, his page,  
 That was but little for his age ;  
 And therefore waited on him so  
 As dwarfs upon knights-errant do. . . .  
 When it had stabb'd, or broke a head,  
 It would scrape trenchers, or chip bread. . . .  
 'Twould make clean shoes, and in the earth  
 Set leeks and onions, and so forth.”<sup>1</sup>

Everything becomes trivial ; if any beauty presents itself, it is spoiled by burlesque. To read those long details of the kitchen, those servile and crude jokes, people might fancy themselves in the company of a common buffoon in the market-place ; it is the talk of the quacks on the bridges, adapting their imagination and language to the manners of the beer-shop and the hovel. There is filth to be met with there ; indeed, the rabble will laugh when the mountebank alludes to the disgusting acts of private life.<sup>2</sup> Such is the grotesque stuff in which the courtiers of the Restoration delighted ; their spite and their coarseness took a

<sup>1</sup> *Hudibras*, part i. canto i. l. 375-386.

<sup>2</sup> “ Quoth Hudibras, I smell a rat.  
 Ralphe, thou dost prevaricate ;  
 For though the thesis which thou lay'st  
 Be true *ad amissum* as thou say'st  
 (For that bear-baiting should appear  
*Jure divino* lawfuller  
 Than Synods are, thou do'st deny,  
*Totidem verbis* ; so do I),  
 Yet there is fallacy in this ;  
 For if by sly *homaeosis*,  
*Tussis pro crepitu*, an art  
 Thou wouldest sophistically imply,  
 Both are unlawful, I deny.”

Part i. canto i. l. 821-834.

pleasure in the spectacle of these bawling puppets; even now, after two centuries, we hear the ribald laughter of this audience of lackeys.

## IV.

Charles II., when at his meals, ostentatiously drew Grammont's attention to the fact that his officers served him on their knees. They were in the right; it was their fit attitude. Lord Chancellor Clarendon, one of the most honoured and honest men of the Court, learns suddenly and in full council that his daughter Anne is *enceinte* by the Duke of York, and that the Duke, the king's brother, has promised her marriage. Listen to the words of this tender father; he has himself taken care to hand them down:

"The Chancellor broke out into a very immoderate passion against the wickedness of his daughter, and said with all imaginable earnestness, 'that as soon as he came home, he would turn her (his daughter) out of his house as a strumpet to shift for herself, and would never see her again.'"<sup>1</sup>

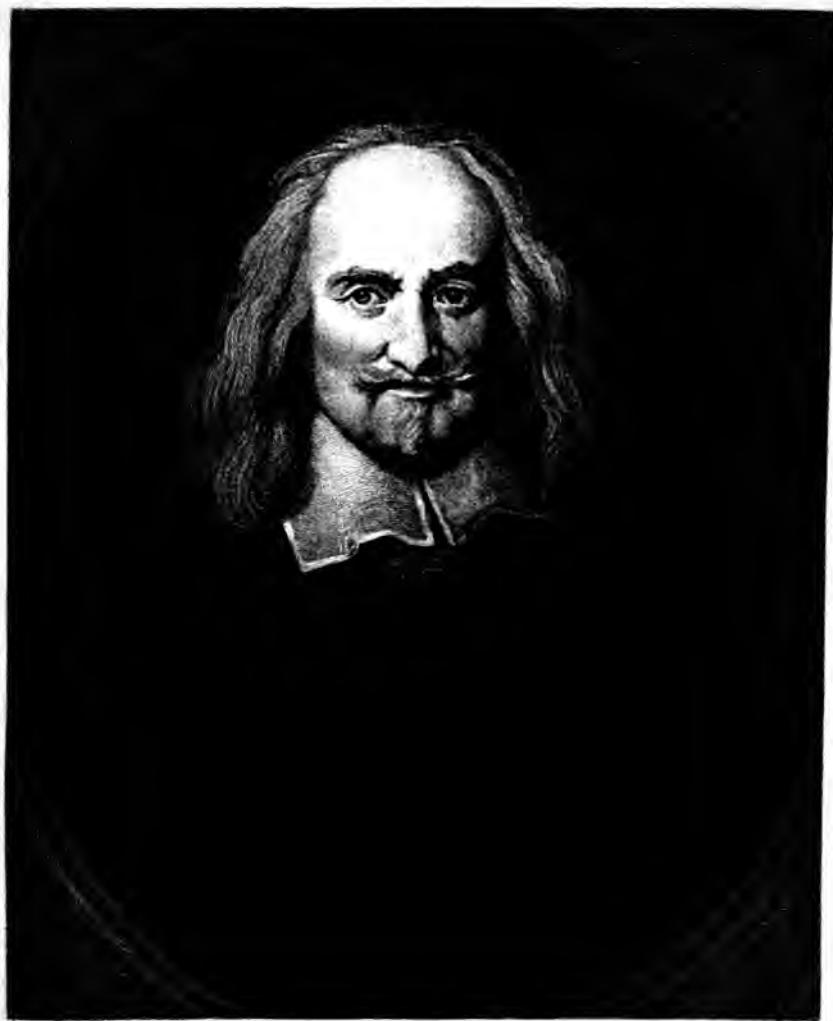
Observe that this great man had received the news from the king unprepared, and that he made use of these fatherly expressions on the spur of the moment. He added, "that he had much rather his daughter should be the duke's whore than his wife." Is this not heroical? But let Clarendon speak for himself. Only such a true monarchical heart can surpass itself:

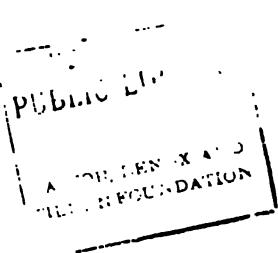
"He was ready to give a positive judgment, in which he hoped their lordships would concur with him; that the king should immediately cause the woman to be sent to the Tower,

<sup>1</sup> *The Life of Clarendon*, ed. by himself, new ed., 1827, 3 vols., I. 878.



*LORI· CHANCHILLOR CLARENCE ·EDWARD HYDE·*





and to be cast into a dungeon under so strict a guard, that no person living should be admitted to come to her; and then that an act of Parliament should be immediately passed for the cutting off her head, to which he would not only give his consent, but would very willingly be the first man that should propose it.”<sup>1</sup>

What Roman virtue! Afraid of not being believed he insists; whoever knew the man, will believe that all this came from the very bottom of his heart. He is not yet satisfied; he repeats his advice; he addresses to the king different conclusive reasonings, in order that they might cut off the head of his daughter:

“I had rather submit and bear it (this disgrace) with all humility, than that it should be repaired by making her his wife, the thought whereof I do so much abominate, that I had much rather see her dead, with all the infamy that is due to her presumption.”<sup>2</sup>

In this manner, a man, who is in difficulty, can keep his salary and his Chancellor’s robes. Sir Charles Berkley, captain of the Duke of York’s guards, did better still; he solemnly swore “that he had lain with the young lady,” and declared himself ready to marry her “for the sake of the duke, though he knew well the familiarity the duke had with her.” Then, shortly afterwards, he confessed that he had lied, but with a good intention, in all honour, in order to save the royal family from such a *mésalliance*. This admirable self-sacrifice was rewarded; he soon had a pension from the privy purse, and was created Earl of Falmouth. From the first, the baseness of the public corporations rivalled that of individuals. The House

<sup>1</sup> *The Life of Clarendon*, i. 379.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* i. 380.

of Commons, but recently master of the country, still full of Presbyterians, rebels, and conquerors, voted "that neither themselves nor the people of England could be freed from the horrid guilt of the late unnatural rebellion, or from the punishment which that guilt merited, unless they formally availed themselves of his majesty's grace and pardon, as set forth in the declaration of Breda." Then all these heroes went in a body and threw themselves with contrition at the sacred feet of their monarch. In this universal prostration it seemed that no one had any courage left. The king became the hireling of Louis XIV., and sold his country for a large pension. Ministers, members of Parliament, ambassadors, all received French money. The contagion spread even to patriots, to men noted for their purity, to martyrs. Lord William Russell intrigued with Versailles; Algernon Sidney accepted 500 guineas. They had not discrimination enough to retain a show of spirit; they had not spirit enough to retain a show of honour.<sup>1</sup>

In men thus laid bare, the first thing that strikes you is the bloodthirsty instinct of brute beasts. Sir John

<sup>1</sup> "Mr. Evelyn tells me of several of the menial servants of the Court lacking bread, that have not received a farthing wages since the King's coming in."—*Pepys' Diary*, ed. Lord Braybrooke, 3d ed., 1848. 5 vols., iv. April 26, 1667.

"Mr. Povy says that to this day the King do follow the women as much as he ever did; that the Duke of York . . . hath come out of his wife's bed, and gone to others laid in bed for him; . . . that the family (of the Duke) is in horrible disorder by being in debt by spending above £60,000 per annum, when he hath not £40,000" (*Ibid.* iv. June 28, 1667).

"It is certain that, as it now is, the seamen of England, in my conscience, would, if they could, go over and serve the king of France or Holland rather than us" (*Ibid.* iv. June 25, 1667).

Coventry, a member of Parliament, let some word escape him, which was construed into a reproach of the royal amours. His friend, the Duke of Monmouth, contrived that he should be treacherously assaulted under the king's command, by respectable men devoted to his service, who slit his nose to the bone. A vile wretch of the name of Blood tried to assassinate the Duke of Ormond, and to stab the keeper of the Tower, in order to steal the crown jewels. Charles II., considering that this was an interesting and distinguished man of his kind, pardoned him, gave him an estate in Ireland, and admitted him to his presence, side by side with the Duke of Ormond, so that Blood became a sort of hero, and was received in good society. After such splendid examples, men dared everything. The Duke of Buckingham, a lover of the Countess of Shrewsbury, slew the Earl in a duel; the Countess, disguised as a page, held Buckingham's horse, while she embraced him, covered as he was with her husband's blood; and the murderer and adulteress returned publicly, and as triumphantly, to the house of the dead man. We can no longer wonder at hearing Count Königsmark describe as a "peccadillo" an assassination which he had committed by waylaying his victim. I transcribe a duel out of Pepys, to give a notion of the manners of these bloodthirsty cut-throats. Sir H. Bellassis and Tom Porter, the greatest friends in the world, were talking together:

"and Sir H. Bellassis talked a little louder than ordinary to Tom Porter, giving of him some advice. Some of the company standing by said, 'What! are they quarrelling, that they talk so high?' Sir H. Bellassis, hearing it, said, 'No!' says he: 'I would have you know I never quarrel, but I strike: and

take that as a rule of mine !' 'How !' says Tom Porter, 'strike ! I would I could see the man in England that durst give me a blow !' with that Sir H. Bellasis did give him a box of the eare ; and so they were going to fight there, but were hindered. . . . Tom Porter, being informed that Sir H. Bellasis' coach was coming, went down out of the coffee-house where he staid for the tidings, and stopped the coach, and bade Sir H. Bellasis come out. 'Why,' says H. Bellasis, 'you will not hurt me coming out, will you ?' 'No,' says Tom Porter. So out he went, and both drew. . . . They wounded one another, and Sir H. Bellasis so much that it is feared he will die"—<sup>1</sup>

which he did ten days after.

Bull-dogs like these took no pity on their enemies. The Restoration opened with a butchery. The Lords conducted the trials of the republicans with a shamelessness of cruelty and an excess of rancour that were extraordinary. A sheriff struggled with Sir Harry Vane on the scaffold, rummaging his pockets, and taking from him a paper which he attempted to read. During the trial of Major-General Harrison, the hangman was placed by his side, in a black dress, with a rope in his hand ; they sought to give him a full enjoyment of the foretaste of death. He was cut down alive from the gibbet, and disembowelled ; he saw his entrails cast into the fire ; he was then quartered, and his still beating heart was torn out and shown to the people. The cavaliers gathered round for amusement. Here and there one of them would do worse even than this. Colonel Turner, seeing them quarter John Coke, the lawyer, told the sheriff's men to bring Hugh Peters, another of the condemned, nearer ; the executioner came up, and rubbing his bloody hands, asked the unfortunate man

<sup>1</sup> *Pepys' Diary*, vol. iv., 29th July 1667.

if the work pleased him. The rotting bodies of Cromwell, Ireton and Bradshaw were dug up in the night, and their heads fixed on poles over Westminster Hall. Ladies went to see these disgusting sights ; the good Evelyn applauded them ; the courtiers made songs on them. These people were fallen so low, that they did not even turn sick at it. Sight and smell no longer aided humanity by producing repugnance ; their senses were as dead as their hearts.

From carnage they threw themselves into debauchery. You should read the life of the Earl of Rochester, a courtier and a poet, who was the hero of the time. His manners were those of a lawless and wretched mountebank ; his delight was to haunt the stews, to debauch women, to write filthy songs and lewd pamphlets ; he spent his time between gossiping with the maids of honour, broils with men of letters, the receiving of insults, the giving of blows. By way of playing the gallant, he eloped with his wife before he married her. Out of a spirit of bravado, he declined fighting a duel, and gained the name of a coward. For five years together he was said to be drunk. The spirit within him failing of a worthy outlet, plunged him into adventures more befitting a clown. Once with the Duke of Buckingham he rented an inn on the Newmarket road, and turned innkeeper, supplying the husbands with drink and defiling their wives. He introduced himself, disguised as an old woman, into the house of a miser, robbed him of his wife, and passed her on to Buckingham. The husband hanged himself ; they made very merry over the affair. At another time he disguised himself as a chairman, then as a beggar, and paid court to the gutter-girls. He ended by turning a

quack astrologer, and vendor of drugs for procuring abortion, in the suburbs. It was the licentiousness of a fervid imagination, which fouled itself as another would have adorned it, which forced its way into lewdness and folly as another would have done into sense and beauty. What can come of love in hands like these? We cannot copy even the titles of his poems; they were written only for the haunts of vice. Stendhal said that love is like a dried up bough cast into a mine; the crystals cover it, spread out into filagree work, and end by converting the worthless stick into a sparkling tuft of the purest diamonds. Rochester begins by depriving love of all its adornment, and to make sure of grasping it, converts it into a stick. Every refined sentiment, every fancy; the enchantment, the serene, sublime glow which transforms in a moment this wretched world of ours; the illusion which, uniting all the powers of our being, shows us perfection in a finite creature, and eternal bliss in a transient emotion,—all has vanished; there remain but satiated appetites and palled senses. The worst of it is, that he writes without spirit, and methodically enough. He has no natural ardour, no picturesque sensuality; his satires prove him a disciple of Boileau. Nothing is more disgusting than obscenity in cold blood. We can endure the obscene works of Giulio Romano, and his Venetian voluptuousness, because in them genius sets off sensuality, and the loveliness of the splendid coloured draperies transforms an orgie into a work of art. We pardon Rabelais, when we have entered into the deep current of manly joy and vigour, with which his feasts abound. We can hold our nose and have done with it, while we follow with admiration, and even sympathy, the torrent of

ideas and fancies which flows through his mire. But to see a man trying to be elegant and remaining obscene, endeavouring to paint the sentiments of a navvy in the language of a man of the world, who tries to find a suitable metaphor for every kind of filth, who plays the blackguard studiously and deliberately, who, excused neither by genuine feeling nor the glow of fancy, nor knowledge, nor genius, degrades a good style of writing to such work,—it is like a rascal who sets himself to sully a set of gems in a gutter. The end of all is but disgust and illness. While La Fontaine continues to the last day capable of tenderness and happiness, this man at the age of thirty insults the weaker sex with spiteful malignity :

“ When she is young, she whores herself for sport ;  
And when she’s old, she bawds for her support. . . .  
She is a snare, a shamble, and a stews ;  
Her meat and sauce she does for lechery chuse,  
And does in laziness delight the more,  
Because by that she is provoked to whore.  
Ungrateful, treacherous, enviously inclined,  
Wild beasts are tamed, floods easier far confined,  
Than is her stubborn and rebellious mind. . . .  
Her temper so extravagant we find,  
She hates, or is impertinently kind.  
Would she be grave, she then looks like a devil,  
And like a fool or whore, when she be civil . . .  
Contentious, wicked, and not fit to trust,  
And covetous to spend it on her lust.”<sup>1</sup>

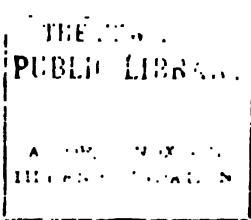
What a confession is such a judgment ! what an abstract of life ! You see the roisterer stupefied at the end of his career, dried up like a mummy, eaten away

<sup>1</sup> Rochester’s works, edited by St. Evremond.

by ulcers. Amid the choruses, the crude satires, the remembrance of plans miscarried, the sullied enjoyments which are heaped up in his wearied brain as in a sink, the fear of damnation is fermenting; he dies a devotee at the age of thirty-three.

At the head of all, the king sets the example. This "old goat," as the courtiers call him, imagines himself a man of gaiety and elegance. What gaiety! what elegance! French manners do not suit men beyond the Channel. When they are Catholics, they fall into narrow superstition; when epicureans, into gross debauchery; when courtiers, into base servility; when sceptics, into vulgar atheism. The court of England could only imitate French furniture and dress. The regular and decent exterior which public taste maintained at Versailles was here dispensed with as troublesome. Charles and his brother, in their state dress, would set off running as in a carnival. On the day when the Dutch fleet burned the English ships in the Thames, the king supped with the Duchess of Monmouth, and amused himself by chasing a moth. In council, while business was being transacted, he would be playing with his dog. Rochester and Buckingham insulted him by insolent repartees or dissolute epigrams; he would fly into a passion and suffer them to go on. He quarrelled with his mistress in public; she called him an idiot, and he called her a jade. He would leave her in the morning, "so that the very sentrys speak of it."<sup>1</sup> He suffered her to play him false before the eyes of all; at one time she received a couple of actors, one of whom was a mountebank. If need were, she would use abusive language to him.

<sup>1</sup> *Pepys' Diary*, ii. January 1, 1662-1663.





*SAMUEL PEPYS*



"The King hath declared that he did not get the child of which she is conceived at this time. But she told him, ". . . ! but you shall own it."<sup>1</sup> Whereupon he did acknowledge the child, and took to himself a couple of actresses for consolation. When his new wife, Catherine of Braganza, arrived, he drove away her attendants, used coarse language to her, that he might force on her the familiarities of his mistress, and finished by degrading her to a friendship such as this. The good Pepys, notwithstanding his loyal feelings, ends by saying, having heard the king and the duke talk, and seeing and observing their manner of discourse, "God forgive me! though I admire them with all the duty possible, yet the more a man considers and observes them, the less he finds of difference between them and other men, though, blessed be God! they are both princes of great nobleness and spirits."<sup>2</sup> He heard that, on a certain day, the king was so besotted with Mrs. Stewart that he gets "into corners, and will be with her half an hour together kissing her to the observation of all the world."<sup>3</sup> Another day, Captain Ferrers told him "how, at a ball at Court, a child was dropped by one of the ladies in dancing." They took it off in a handkerchief, "and the King had it in his closet a week after, and did dissect it, making great sport of it."<sup>4</sup> Those ghastly freaks and these lewd events make us shudder. The courtiers went with the stream. Miss Jennings, who became Duchess of Tyrconnel, disguised herself one day as an orange girl, and cried her wares in the street.<sup>5</sup> Pepys recounts festivities in which lords and ladies smeared one another's

<sup>1</sup> *Pepys' Diary*, iv. July 30, 1667.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iii. July 26, 1665.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* ii. Nov. 9, 1668.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* ii. Feb. 8, 17, 1662-3.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* Feb. 21, 1664-1665.

faces with candle-grease and soot, "till most of us were like devils." It was the fashion to swear, to relate scandalous adventures, to get drunk, to prate against the preachers and Scripture, to gamble. Lady Castlemaine in one night lost £25,000. The Duke of St. Albans, a blind man, eighty years old, went to the gambling-house with an attendant at his side to tell him the cards. Sedley and Buckhurst stripped nearly naked, and ran through the streets after midnight. Another, in the open day, stood naked at the window to address the people. I let Grammont keep to himself his accounts of the maids of honour brought to bed, and of unnatural lusts. We must either exhibit or conceal them, and I have not the courage lightly to insinuate them, after his fashion. I end by a quotation from Pepys, which will serve for example: "Here I first understood by their talk the meaning of company that lately were called Ballers; Harris telling how it was by a meeting of some young blades, where he was among them, and my Lady Bennet and her ladies; and their dancing naked, and all the roguish things in the world."<sup>1</sup> The marvellous thing is, that this fair is not even gay; these people were misanthropic, and became morose; they quote the gloomy Hobbes, and he is their master. In fact, the philosophy of Hobbes shall give us the last word and the last characteristics of this society.

## V.

Hobbes was one of those powerful, limited, and, as they are called, positive minds, so common in England, of the school of Swift and Bentham, efficacious and

<sup>1</sup> The author has inadvertently confounded "my Lady Bennet" with the Countess of Arlington. See *Pepys' Diary*, iv. May 30, 1668, *footnote*.—TR.

remorseless as an iron machine. Hence we find in him a method and style of surprising dryness and vigour, most adapted to build up and pull down; hence a philosophy which, by the audacity of its teaching, has placed in an undying light one of the indestructible phases of the human mind. In every object, every event, there is some primitive and constant fact, which forms, as it were, the nucleus around which group themselves the various developments which complete it. The positive mind swoops down immediately upon this nucleus, crushes the brilliant growth which covers it; disperses, annihilates it; then, concentrating upon it the full force of its violent grasp, loosens it, raises it up, shapes it, and lifts it into a conspicuous position, from whence it may henceforth shine out to all men and for all time like a crystal. All ornament, all emotions, are excluded from the style of Hobbes; it is a mere aggregate of arguments and concise facts in a small space, united together by deduction, as by iron bands. There are no tints, no fine or unusual word. He makes use only of words most familiar to common and lasting usage; there are not a dozen employed by him which, during two hundred years, have grown obsolete; he pierces to the root of all sensation, removes the transient and brilliant externals, narrows the solid portion which is the permanent subject-matter of all thought, and the proper object of common intelligence. He curtails throughout in order to strengthen; he attains solidity by suppression. Of all the bonds which connect ideas, he retains but one, and that the most stable; his style is only a continuous chain of reasoning of the most stubborn description, wholly made up of additions and subtractions, reduced to a combination of certain simple

ideas, which added on to or diminishing from one another, make up, under various names, the totals or differences, of which we are for ever either studying the formation or unravelling the elements. He pursued beforehand the method of Condillac, beginning with tracing to the original fact, palpably and clearly, so as to pursue step by step the filiation and parentage of the ideas of which this primary fact is the stock, in such a manner that the reader, conducted from total to total, may at any moment test the exactness of his operation, and verify the truth of his results. Such a logical system cuts across the grain of prejudice with a mechanical stiffness and boldness. Hobbes clears science of scholastic words and theories. He laughs down quiddities, he does away with rational and intelligible classifications, he rejects the authority of references.<sup>1</sup> He cuts, as with a surgeon's knife, at the heart of the most living creeds. He denies the authenticity of the books of Moses, Joshua, and the like. He declares that no argument proves the divinity of Scripture, and that, in order to believe it, every man requires a supernatural and personal revelation. He upsets in half-a-dozen words the authority of this and every other revelation.<sup>2</sup> He reduces man to a mere body, the soul

<sup>1</sup> Though I reverence those men of ancient times that either have written truth perspicuously, or set it in a better way to find it out ourselves, yet to the antiquity itself, I think nothing due; for if we reverence the age, the present is the oldest.—Hobbes' *Works*, Molesworth, 11 vols. 8vo, 1839-45, iii. 712.

<sup>2</sup> “To say he hath spoken to him in a dream, is no more than to say he dreamed that God spoke to him. . . . To say he hath seen a vision or heard a voice, is to say that he has dreamed between sleeping and waking. . . . To say he speaks by supernatural inspiration, is to say he finds an ardent DESIRE to speak, or some strong opinion of himself for which he can allege no sufficient and natural reason.”—*Ibid.* iii. 361-2.

to a function, God, to an unknown existence. His phrases read like equations or mathematical results. In fact it is from mathematics<sup>1</sup> that he derives the idea of all science. He would reconstitute moral science on the same basis. He assigns to it this foundation when he lays down that sensation is an internal movement caused by an external shock; desire, an internal movement toward an external object; and he builds upon these two notions the whole system of morals. Again, he assigns to morals a mathematical method, when he distinguishes, like the geometrician, between two simple ideas, which he transforms by degrees into two more complex; and when on the basis of sensation and desire he constructs the passions, the rights, and institutions of man, just as the geometrician out of straight lines and curves constructs all the varieties of figure. To morals he gives a mathematical aspect, by mapping out the incomplete and rigid construction of human life, like the network of imaginary forms which geometers have conceived. For the first time there was discernible in him, as in Descartes, but exaggerated and standing out more conspicuously, that species of intellect which produced the classic age in Europe: not the independence of inspiration and genius which marked the Renaissance; not the mature experimental methods and conceptions of aggregates which distinguish the present age, but the independence

<sup>1</sup> "From the principal parts of Nature, Reason, and Passion, have proceeded two kinds of learning, *mathematical* and *dogmatical*. The former is free from controversy and dispute, because it consisteth in comparing figure and motion only, in which things *truth* and the *interest of men* oppose not each other. But in the other there is nothing undisputable, because it compares men, and meddles with their right and profit."—Hobbes' *Works*, Molesworth, 11 vols. 8vo, 1889-45, iv. Epia. ded.

of argumentative reasoning, which dispensing with the imagination, liberating itself from tradition, badly practising experience, acknowledges its queen in logic, its model in mathematics, its instrument in ratiocination, its audience in polished society, its employment in average truth, its subject-matter in abstract humanity, its formula in ideology, and in the French Revolution at once its glory and its condemnation, its triumph and its close.

But whereas Descartes, in the midst of a purified society and religion, noble and calm, enthroned intelligence and elevated man, Hobbes, in the midst of an overthrown society and a religion run mad, degraded man and enthroned matter. Through disgust of Puritanism, the courtiers reduced human existence to an animal licentiousness ; through disgust of Puritanism, Hobbes reduced human nature to its merely animal aspect. The courtiers were practically atheists and brutish, as he was atheistic and brutish in the province of speculation. They had established the fashion of instinct and egotism ; he wrote the philosophy of egotism and instinct. They had wiped out from their hearts all refined and noble sentiments ; he wiped out from the heart all noble and refined sentiment. He arranged their manners into a theory, gave them the manual of their conduct, wrote down beforehand the maxims which they were to reduce to practice.<sup>1</sup> With him, as with them, "the greatest good is the preservation of life and limb ; the greatest evil is death, especially with pain." Other goods and other evils are only the means of these. None seek or wish for anything but that which is pleasurable. "No man gives except

<sup>1</sup> His chief works were written between 1646 and 1655.

for a personal advantage." Why are friendships good things? "Because they are useful; friends serve for defence and otherwise." Why do we pity one another? "Because we imagine that a similar misfortune may befall ourselves." Why is it noble to pardon him who asks it? "Because thus one proves confidence in self." Such is the background of the human heart. Consider now what becomes of the most precious flowers in these blighting hands. "Music, painting, poetry, are agreeable as imitations which recall the past, because if the past was good, it is agreeable in its imitation as a good thing; but if it was bad, it is agreeable in its imitation as being past." To this gross mechanism he reduces the fine arts; it was perceptible in his attempt to translate the *Iliad*. In his sight, philosophy is a thing of like kind. "Wisdom is serviceable, because it has in it some kind of protection; if it is desirable in itself, it is because it is pleasant." Thus there is no dignity in knowledge. It is a pastime or an assistance; good, as a servant or a puppet is a good thing. Money being more serviceable, is worth more. "Not he who is wise is rich, as the Stoics say; but, on the contrary, he who is rich is wise."<sup>1</sup> As to religion, it is but "the fear of an in-

<sup>1</sup> Nemo dat nisi respiciens ad bonum sibi.

Amicitiae bona, nempe utilia. Nam amicitiae cum ad multa alia, tum ad praesidium conferunt.

Sapientia utile. Nam praesidium in se habet nonnullum. Etiam appetibile est per se, id est jucundum. Item pulchrum, quia acquisitu difficultia.

Non enim qui sapiens est, ut dixerit stoici, dives est, sed contra qui dives est sapiens est dicendum est.

Ignoscere veniam petenti pulchrum. Nam indicium fiduciae sui.

Imitatio jucundum: revocat enim praeterita. Praeterita autem si bona fuerint, jucunda sunt representata, quia bona; si mala, quia praeterita. Jucunda igitur musica, poesis pictura.—Hobbes' *Opera Latina*, Molesworth, vol. ii. 98-102.

visible power, whether this be a figment, or adopted from history by general consent.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, this was true for a Rochester or a Charles II.; cowards or bullies, superstitious or blasphemers, they conceived of nothing beyond. Neither is there any natural right. “Before men were bound by contract one with another, each had the right to do what he would against whom he would.” Nor any natural friendship. “All association is for the cause of advantage or of glory, that is, for love of one’s self, not of one’s associates. The origin of great and durable associations is not mutual well-wishing but mutual fear. The desire of injuring is innate in all. Man is to man a wolf. . . . Warfare was the natural condition of men before societies were formed; and this not incidentally, but of all against all: and this war is of its own nature eternal.”<sup>2</sup> Sectarian violence let loose, the conflict of ambitions, the fall of governments, the overflow of soured imaginations and malevolent passions, had raised up this idea of society and of mankind. One and all, philosophers and people, yearned for monarchy and repose. Hobbes, an inexorable logician, would have it absolute; repression would

<sup>1</sup> Metus potentiarum invisibilium, sive facta illa sint, sive ab historiis accepta sint publice, religio est si publice accepta non sint, supersticio.—Hobbes’ *Opera Latina*, Molesworth, iii. 45.

<sup>2</sup> Omnis igitur societas vel commodi causa vel gloria, hoc est, sui, non sociorum amore contrahitur.—*Ibid.* ii. 161.

Statuendum igitur est, originem magnarum et diutinarum societatum non a mutua hominum benevolentia, sed a mutuo metu extitisse.—*Ibid.* ii. 161.

Voluntas sedendi omnibus quidem inest in statu naturae.—*Ibid.* ii. 162.

Status hominum naturalis antequam in societatem coiretur bellum fuerit; neque hoc simpliciter, sed bellum omnium in omnes.—*Ibid.* ii. 166.

Bellum sua natura sempiternum.—See 166, l. 16.

thus be more stern, peace more lasting. The sovereign should be unopposed. Whatsoever he might do against a subject, under whatever pretext, would not be injustice. He ought to decide upon the canonical books. He was pope, and more than pope. Were he to command it, his subjects should renounce Christ, at least with their mouth; the original contract has given up to him, without any reservation, all responsibility of external actions; at least, according to this view, the sectarian will no longer have the pretext of his conscience in harassing the state. To such extremities had the intense weariness and horror of civil war driven a narrow but logical intellect. Upon the secure den in which he had with every effort imprisoned and confined the evil beast of prey, he laid as a final weight, in order that he might perpetuate the captivity of humanity, the whole philosophy and theory not simply of man, but of the remainder of the universe. He reduced judgment to the “combination of two terms,” ideas to conditions of the brain, sensations to motions of the body, general laws to simple words, all substance to corporeality, all science to the knowledge of sensible bodies, the human being to a body capable of motion given or received; so that man, recognising himself and nature only under this despised form, and degraded in his conception of himself and of the world, might bow beneath the burden of a necessary authority, and submit in the end to the yoke which his rebellious nature rejects, yet is forced to tolerate.<sup>1</sup> Such, in brief, is the aim which this spec-

<sup>1</sup> *Corpus et substantia idem significant, et proinde vox composita substantia incorpore a est insignificans sequi ac si quis diceret corpus incorporeum.*—Hobbes’ *Opera Latina*, Molesworth, iii. 281.

*Quidquid imaginatur finitum est. Nulla ergo est idea neque conceptus qui oriri potest a voce hac, infinitum.*—*Ibid.* iii. 20.

tacle of the English Restoration suggests. Men deserved then this treatment, because they gave birth to this philosophy ; they were represented on the stage as they had proved themselves to be in theory and in manners.

## VI.

When the theatres, which Parliament had closed, were re-opened, the change of public taste was soon manifested. Shirley, the last of the grand old school, wrote and lived no longer. Waller, Buckingham, and Dryden were compelled to dish up the plays of Shakespeare and Beaumont and Fletcher, and to adapt them to the modern style. Pepys, who went to see *Midsummer Night's Dream*, declared that he would never go there again ; " for it is the most insipid, ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life."<sup>1</sup> Comedy was transformed ; the fact was, that the public was transformed.

What an audience was that of Shakspeare and Beaumont and Fletcher ! What youthful and delightful souls ! In this evil-smelling room in which it was necessary to burn juniper, before that miserable half-lighted stage, before decorations worthy of an alehouse, with men playing the women's parts, illusion enchain'd them. They scarcely troubled themselves about probabilities ; they could be carried in an instant over forest and ocean, from clime to clime, across twenty years of time, through

Recidit itaque ratiocinatio omnis ad duas operationes animi, additionem et subtractionem.—Hobbes' *Opera Latina*, Molesworth, i. 3.

Nomina signa sunt non rerum sed cogitationem.—*Ibid.* i. 15.

Veritas enim in dicto non in re consistit.—*Ibid.* i. 31.

Sensio igitur in sentiente nihil aliud esse potest praeter motum partium aliquarum intus in sentiente existentium, quae partes motae organorum quibus sentimus partes sunt.—*Ibid.* i. 317.

<sup>1</sup> *Pepys' Diary*, ii. Sept. 29, 1662.



*THOMAS HOBbes*



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ten battles and all the hurry of adventure. They did not care to be always laughing ; comedy, after a burst of buffoonery, resumed its serious or tender tone. They came less to be amused than to muse. In these fresh minds, amidst a woof of passions and dreams, there were hidden passions and brilliant dreams whose imprisoned swarm buzzed indistinctly, waiting for the poet to come and lay bare to them the novelty and the splendour of heaven. Landscapes revealed by a lightning flash, the gray mane of a long and overhanging billow, a wet forest nook where the deer raise their startled heads, the sudden smile and purpling cheek of a young girl in love, the sublime and various flight of all delicate sentiments, a cloak of ecstatic and romantic passion over all,—these were the sights and feelings which they came to seek. They raised themselves without any assistance to the summit of the world of ideas ; they desired to contemplate extreme generosity, absolute love ; they were not astonished at the sight of fairy-land ; they entered without an effort into the region of poetical transformation, whose light was necessary to their eyes. They took in at a glance its excesses and its caprices ; they needed no preparation ; they followed its digressions, its whimsicalities, the crowding of its abundant creations, the sudden prodigality of its high colouring, as a musician follows a symphony. They were in that transient and strained condition in which the imagination, adult and pure, laden with desire, curiosity, force, develops man all at once, and in that man the most exalted and exquisite feelings.

The roisterers took the place of these. They were rich, they had tried to deck themselves with the polish of Frenchmen ; they added to the stage moveable decora-

tions, music, lights, probability, comfort, every external aid ; but they wanted heart, Imagine those foppish and half-intoxicated men, who saw in love nothing beyond desire, and in man nothing beyond sensuality ; Rochester in the place of Mercutio. What part of his soul could comprehend poesy and fancy ? The comedy of romance was altogether beyond his reach ; he could only seize the actual world, and of this world but the palpable and gross externals. Give him an exact picture of ordinary life, commonplace and probable occurrences, literal imitations of what he himself was and did ; lay the scene in London, in the current year ; copy his coarse words, his brutal jokes, his conversation with the orange girls, his rendezvous in the park, his attempts at French dissertation. Let him recognise himself, let him find again the people and the manners he had just left behind him in the tavern or the antechamber ; let the theatre and the street reproduce one another. Comedy will give him the same entertainment as real life ; he will wallow equally well there in vulgarity and lewdness ; to be present there will demand neither imagination nor wit ; eyes and memory are the only requisites. This exact imitation will amuse him and instruct him at the same time. Filthy words will make him laugh through sympathy ; shameless imagery will divert him by appealing to his recollections. The author, too, will take care to arouse him by his plot, which generally has the deceiving of a father or a husband for its subject. The fine gentlemen agree with the author in siding with the gallant ; they follow his fortunes with interest, and fancy that they themselves have the same success with the fair. Add to this, women debauched, and willing to be debauched ;

and it is manifest how these provocations, these manners of prostitutes, that interchange of exchanges and surprises, that carnival of rendezvous and suppers, the impudence of the scenes only stopping short of physical demonstration, those songs with their double meaning, that coarse slang shouted loudly and replied to amidst the *tableaux vivants*, all that stage-imitation of orgie, must have stirred up the innermost feelings of the habitual practisers of intrigue. And what is more, the theatre gave its sanction to their manners. By representing nothing but vice, it authorised their vices. Authors laid it down as a rule, that all women were impudent hussies, and that all men were brutes. Debauchery in their hands became a matter of course, nay more, a matter of good taste; they profess it. Rochester and Charles II. could quit the theatre highly edified; more convinced than they were before that virtue was only a pretence, the pretence of clever rascals who wanted to sell themselves dear.

## VII.

Dryden, who was amongst the first<sup>1</sup> to adopt this view of the matter, did not adopt it heartily. A kind of hazy mist, the relic of the former age, still floated over his plays. His wealthy imagination half bound him to the comedy of romance. At one time he adapted Milton's *Paradise*, Shakspeare's *Tempest*, and *Troilus and Cressida*. Another time he imitated, in *Love in a Nunnery*, in *Marriage à la Mode*, in *The Mock Astrologer*, the imbroglios and surprises of the Spanish stage. Sometimes he displays the sparkling images

<sup>1</sup> His *Wild Gallant* dates from 1662.

and lofty metaphors of the older national poets, sometimes the affected figures of speech and cavilling wit of Calderon and Lope de Vega. He mixes the tragic and the humorous, the overthrow of thrones and the ordinary description of manners. But in this awkward compromise the poetic spirit of ancient comedy disappears; only the dress and the gilding remain. The new characters are gross and immoral, with the instincts of a lackey beneath the dress of a lord; which is the more shocking, because by it Dryden contradicts his own talents, being at bottom grave and a poet; he follows the fashion, and not his own mind; he plays the libertine with deliberate forethought, to adapt himself to the taste of the day.<sup>1</sup> He plays the blackguard awkwardly and dogmatically; he is impious without enthusiasm, and in measured periods. One of his gallants cries:

“ Is not love love without a priest and altars ?  
The temples are inanimate, and know not  
What vows are made in them ; the priest stands ready  
For his hire, and cares not what hearts he couples ;  
Love alone is marriage.”<sup>2</sup>

Hippolita says, “ I wished the ball might be kept perpetually in our cloister, and that half the handsome

<sup>1</sup> “ We love to get our mistresses, and purr over them, as cats do over mice, and let them get a little way ; and all the pleasure is to put them back again.”—*Mock Astrologer*, ii. 1.

Wildblood says to his mistress : “ I am none of those unreasonable lovers that propose to themselves the loving to eternity. A month is commonly my stint.” And Jacintha replies : “ Or would not a fortnight serve our turn ?”—*Mock Astrologer*, ii. 1.

Frequently one would think Dryden was translating Hobbes, by the harshness of his jests.

<sup>2</sup> *Love in a Nunnery*, ii. 3.

nuns in it might be turned to men, for the sake of the other.”<sup>1</sup> Dryden has no tact or contrivance. In his *Spanish Friar*, the queen, a good enough woman, tells Torrismond that she is going to have the old dethroned king put to death, in order to marry him, Torrismond, more at her ease. Presently she is informed that the murder is completed. “What hinders now,” says she, “but that the holy priest, in secret joins our mutual vows? and then this night, this happy night, is yours and mine.”<sup>2</sup> Side by side with this sensual tragedy, a comic intrigue, pushed to the most indecent familiarity, exhibits the love of a cavalier for a married woman, who in the end turns out to be his sister. Dryden discovers nothing in this situation to shock him. He has lost the commonest repugnances of natural modesty. Translating any pretty broad play, *Amphytrion* for instance, he finds it too pure; he strips off all its small delicacies, and enlarges its very improprieties.<sup>3</sup> Thus Jupiter says:

“For kings and priests are in a manner bound,  
For reverence sake, to be close hypocrites.”<sup>4</sup>

And he proceeds thereupon boldly to lay bare his own

<sup>1</sup> *Love in a Nunnery*, iii. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Spanish Friar*, iii. 3. And jumbled up with the plot we keep meeting with political allusions. This is a mark of the time. Torrismond, to excuse himself from marrying the queen, says, “Power which in one age is tyranny is ripen’d in the next to true succession. She’s in possession.”—*Spanish Friar*, iv. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Plautus’ *Amphytrion* has been imitated by Dryden and Molière. Sir Walter Scott, in the introduction to Dryden’s play, says: “He is, in general, coarse and vulgar, where Molière is witty; and where the Frenchman ventures upon a double meaning, the Englishman always contrives to make it a single one.”—Tr.

<sup>4</sup> *Amphytrion*, i. 1.

despotism. In reality, his sophisms and his shamelessness serve Dryden as a means of decrying by rebound the arbitrary Divinity of the theologians. He lets Jupiter say :

“ Fate is what I,  
By virtue of omnipotence, have made it ;  
And power omnipotent can do no wrong !  
Not to myself, because I will it so ;  
Nor yet to men, for what they are is mine.—  
This night I will enjoy Amphitryon’s wife ;  
For when I made her, I decreed her such  
As I should please to love.”<sup>1</sup>

This open pedantry is changed into open lust as soon as Jupiter sees Alcmena. No detail is omitted : Jupiter speaks his whole mind to her, and before the maids ; and next morning, when he is going away, she outdoes him : she hangs on to him, and indulges in the most familiar details. All the noble externals of high gallantry are torn off like a troublesome garment ; it is a cynical recklessness in place of aristocratic decency ; the scene is written after the example of Charles II. and Castlemaine, not of Louis XIV. and Mme. de Montespan.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Amphitryon*, i. 1.

<sup>2</sup> As Jupiter is departing, on the plea of daylight, Alcmena says to him :

“ But you and I will draw our curtains close,  
Extinguish daylight, and put out the sun.  
Come back, my lord. . . .  
You have not yet laid long enough in bed  
To warm your widowed side.”—Act ii. 2.

Compare Plautus’ Roman matron and Molière’s honest French woman with this expansive female. [Louis XIV. and Mme. de Montespan were not very decent either. See *Mémoires de Saint Simon*.]—Tr.

## VIII.

I pass over several writers: Crowne, author of *Sir Courly Nice*; Shadwell, an imitator of Ben Jonson; Mrs. Aphra Behn, who calls herself Astræa, a spy and a courtesan, paid by government and the public. Etherege is the first to set the example of imitative comedy in his *Man of Fashion*, and to depict only the manners of his age; for the rest he is an open roisterer, and frankly describes his habits:

“From hunting whores, and haunting play,  
And minding nothing all the day,  
And all the night too, you will say.” . .

Such were his pursuits in London; and further on, in a letter from Ratisbon to Lord Middleton,

“He makes grave legs in formal fetters,  
Converses with fools and writes dull letters;”

and gets small consolation out of the German ladies. In this grave mood Etherege undertook the duties of an ambassador. One day, having dined too freely, he fell from the top of a staircase, and broke his neck; a death of no great importance. But the hero of this society was William Wycherley, the coarsest writer who ever polluted the stage. Being sent to France during the Revolution, he there became a Roman Catholic; then on his return abjured; then in the end, as Pope tells us, abjured again. Robbed of their Protestant ballast, these shallow brains ran from dogma to dogma, from superstition to incredulity or indifference, to end in a state of fear. He had learnt at M. de Montausier's<sup>1</sup> residence

<sup>1</sup> Himself a Huguenot, who had become a Roman Catholic, and the husband of Julie d'Angennes, for whom the French poets composed the celebrated *Guirlande*.—TR.

the art of wearing gloves and a peruke, which sufficed in those days to make a gentleman. This merit, and the success of a filthy piece, *Love in a Wood*, drew upon him the eyes of the Duchess of Cleveland, mistress of the king and of anybody. This woman, who used to have amours with a rope-dancer, picked him up one day in the very midst of the Ring. She put her head out of her carriage-window, and cried to him before all, "Sir, you are a rascal, a villain, the son of a \_\_\_\_." Touched by this compliment, he accepted her favours, and in consequence obtained those of the king. He lost them, married the Countess of Drogheda, a woman of bad temper, ruined himself, remained seven years in prison, passed the remainder of his life in pecuniary difficulties, regretting his youth, losing his memory, scribbling bad verses, which he got Pope to correct, amidst many twitches of wounded self-esteem, stringing together dull obscenities, dragging his worn out body and enervated brain through the stages of misanthropy and libertinage, playing the miserable part of a toothless roisterer and a white-haired blackguard. Eleven days before his death he married a young girl, who turned out to be a strumpet. He ended as he had begun, by stupidity and misconduct, having succeeded neither in becoming happy nor honest, having used his vigorous intelligence and real talent only to his own injury and the injury of others.

The reason was, that Wycherley was not an epicurean born. His nature, genuinely English, that is to say, energetic and sombre, rebelled against the easy and amiable carelessness which enables one to take life as a pleasure-party. His style is laboured, and troublesome to read. His tone is virulent and bitter. He

frequently forces his comedy in order to get at spiteful satire. Effort and animosity mark all that he says or puts into the mouths of others. It is Hobbes, not meditative and calm, but active and angry, who sees in man nothing but vice, yet feels himself man to the very core. The only fault he rejects is hypocrisy ; the only virtue he preaches is frankness. He wants others to confess their vice, and he begins by confessing his own. "Though I cannot lie like them (the poets), I am as vain as they ; I cannot but publicly give your Grace my humble acknowledgments. . . . This is the poet's gratitude, which in plain English is only pride and ambition."<sup>1</sup> We find in him no poetry of expression, no glimpse of the ideal, no settled morality which could console, raise, or purify men. He shuts them up in their perversity and uncleanness, and installs himself among them. He shows them the filth of the lowest depths in which he confines them ; he expects them to breathe this atmosphere ; he plunges them into it, not to disgust them with it as by an accidental fall, but to accustom them to it as if it were their natural element. He tears down the partitions and decorations by which they endeavour to conceal their state, or regulate their disorder. He takes pleasure in making them fight, he delights in the hubbub of their unfettered instincts ; he loves the violent changes of the human mass, the confusion of their wicked deeds, the rawness of their bruises. He strips their lusts, sets them forth at full length, and of course feels them himself ; and whilst he condemns them as nauseous,

<sup>1</sup> *The Dramatic Works of Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar*, ed. Leigh Hunt, 1840. Dedication of *Love in a Wood* to her Grace the Duchess of Cleveland.

he enjoys them. People take what pleasure they can get: the drunkards in the suburbs, if asked how they can relish their miserable liquor, will tell you it makes them drunk as soon as better stuff, and that is the only pleasure they have.

I can understand that an author may dare much in a novel. It is a psychological study, akin to criticism or history, having almost equal license, because it contributes almost equally to explain the anatomy of the heart. It is quite necessary to expose moral diseases, especially when this is done to add to science, coldly, accurately, and in the fashion of a dissection. Such a book is by its nature abstruse; it must be read in the study, by lamp-light. But transport it to the stage, exaggerate the bed-room liberties, give them additional life by a few disreputable scenes, bestow bodily vigour upon them by the energetic action and words of the actresses; let the eyes and the senses be filled with them, not the eyes of an individual spectator, but of a thousand men and women mingled together in the pit, excited by the interest of the story, by the correctness of the literal imitation, by the glitter of the lights, by the noise of applause, by the contagion of impressions which run like a shudder through fiery and longing minds. That was the spectacle which Wycherley furnished, and which the court appreciated. Is it possible that a public, and a select public, could come and listen to such scenes? In *Love in a Wood*, amidst the complications of nocturnal rendezvous, and violations effected or begun, we meet with a witling, named Dapperwit, who desires to sell his mistress Lucy to a fine gentleman of that age, Ranger. With what minuteness he bepraises her! He knocks at her door; the

intended purchaser meantime, growing impatient, is treating him like a slave. The mother comes in, but wishing to sell Lucy herself and for her own advantage, scolds them and packs them off. Next appears an old puritanical usurer and hypocrite, named Gripe, who at first will not bargain :—

*Mrs. Joyner.* You must send for something to entertain her with. . . . Upon my life a groat ! what will this purchase ?

*Gripe.* Two black pots of ale and a cake, at the cellar.— Come, the wine has arsenic in't. . . .

*Mrs. J.* A treat of a groat ! I will not wag.

*G.* Why dont you go ? Here, take more money, and fetch what you will ; take here, half-a-crown.

*Mrs. J.* What will half-a-crown do ?

*G.* Take a crown then, an angel, a piece ;—begone !

*Mrs. J.* A treat only will not serve my turn ; I must buy the poor wretch there some toys.

*G.* What toys ? what ? speak quickly.

*Mrs. J.* Pendants, necklaces, fans, ribbons, points, laces, stockings, gloves. . . .

*G.* But here, take half a piece for the other things.

*Mrs. J.* Half a piece !—

*G.* Prithee, begone !—take t'other piece then—two pieces— three pieces—five ! here ; 'tis all I have.

*Mrs. J.* I must have the broad-seal ring too, or I stir not.”<sup>1</sup>

She goes away at last, having extorted all, and Lucy plays the innocent, seems to think that Gripe is a dancing-master, and asks for a lesson. What scenes, what double meanings ! At last she calls out, her mother, *Mrs. Crossbite*, breaks open the door, and enters with men placed there beforehand ; Gripe is

<sup>1</sup> Act iii. 3.

caught in the trap ; they threaten to call in the constable, they swindle him out of five hundred pounds.

Need I recount the plot of the *Country Wife*? It is useless to wish to skim the subject only ; we sink deeper and deeper. Horner, a gentleman returned from France, spreads the report that he is no longer able to trouble the peace of husbands. You may imagine what becomes of such a subject in Wycherley's hands, and he draws from it all that it contains. Women converse about Horner's condition, even before him ; they suffer themselves to be undeceived, and boast of it. Three of them come to him and feast, drink, sing—such songs! The excess of orgie triumphs, adjudges itself the crown, displays itself in maxims. "Our virtue," says one of them, "is like the statesman's religion, the quaker's word, the gamester's oath, and the great man's honour; but to cheat those that trust us."<sup>1</sup> In the last scene, the suspicions which had been aroused, are set at rest by a new declaration of Horner. All the marriages are polluted, and the carnival ends by a dance of deceived husbands. To crown all, Horner recommends his example to the public, and the actress who comes on to recite the epilogue, completes the shameful ness of the piece, by warning gallants that they must look what they are doing ; for that if they can deceive men, "we women —there's no cozening us."<sup>2</sup>

But the special and most extraordinary sign of the times is, that amid all these provocatives, no repellent circumstance is omitted, and that the narrator seems to

<sup>1</sup> *The Country Wife*, v. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Read the epilogue, and see what words and details authors dared them to put in the mouths of actresses.

aim as much at disgusting as at depraving us.<sup>1</sup> Every moment the fine gentlemen, even the ladies, introduce into their conversation the ways and means by which, since the sixteenth century, love has endeavoured to adorn itself. Dapperwit, when making an offer of Lucy, says, in order to account for the delay: "Pish! give her but leave to . . . put on . . . the long patch under the left eye; awaken the roses on her cheeks with some Spanish wool, and warrant her breath with some lemon-peel."<sup>2</sup> Lady Flippant, alone in the park, cries out: "Unfortunate lady that I am! I have left the herd on purpose to be chased, and have wandered this hour here; but the park affords not so much as a satyr for me; and no Burgundy man or drunken scourer will reel my way. The rag-women and cinder-women have better luck than I."<sup>3</sup>

Judge by these quotations, which are the best, of the remainder! Wycherley makes it his business to revolt even the senses; the nose, the eyes, everything suffers in his plays; the audience must have had the stomach of a sailor. And from this abyss English literature has ascended to the strict morality, the excessive decency which it now possesses! This stage is a declared war against beauty and delicacy of every kind. If Wycherley borrows a character anywhere, it is only to do violence,

<sup>1</sup> "That spark, who has his fruitless designs upon the bed-ridden rich widow, down to the sucking heiress in her . . . clout."—*Love in a Wood*, i. 2.

*Mrs. Flippant*: "Though I had married the fool, I thought to have reserved the wit as well as other ladies."—*Ibid.*

*Dapperwit*: "I will contest with no rival, not with my old rival your coachman."—*Ibid.*

"She has a complexion like a holland cheese, and no more teeth left, than such as give a haut goût to her breath."—*Ibid.* ii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Love in a Wood*, iii. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* v. 2.

or degrade it to the level of his own characters. If he imitates the Agnes of Molière,<sup>1</sup> as he does in the *Country Wife*, he marries her in order to profane marriage, deprives her of honour, still more of modesty, still more of grace, and changes her artless tenderness into shameless instincts and scandalous confessions. If he takes Shakespeare's Viola, as in the *Plain Dealer*, it is to drag her through the vileness of infamy, amidst brutalities and surprises. If he translates the part of Molière's Célimène, he wipes out at one stroke the manners of a great lady, the woman's delicacy, the tact of the lady of the house, the politeness, the refined air, the superiority of wit and knowledge of the world, in order to substitute for them the impudence and deceit of a foul-mouthed courtesan. If he invents an almost innocent girl, Hippolite,<sup>2</sup> he begins by putting into her mouth words that will not bear transcribing. Whatever he does or says, whether he copies or originates, blames or praises, his stage is a defamation of mankind, which repels even when it attracts, and which sickens a man while it corrupts.

A certain gift hovers over all—namely, vigour—

<sup>1</sup> The letter of Agnes, in Molière's *l'École des Femmes*, iii. 4, begins thus: "Je veux vous écrire, et je suis bien en peine par où je m'y prendrai. J'ai des pensées que je désirerais que vous suscieriez ; mais je ne sais comment faire pour vous les dire, et je me défie de mes paroles," etc. Observe how Wycherley translates it: "Dear, sweet Mr. Horner, my husband would have me send you a base, rude, unmannerly letter ; but I won't—and would have me forbid you loving me ; but I won't—and would have me say to you, I hate you, poor Mr. Horner ; but I won't tell a lie for him—for I'm sure if you and I were in the country at cards together, I could not help treading on your toe under the table, or rubbing knees with you, and staring in your face, till you saw me, and then looking down, and blushing for an hour together," etc.—*Country Wife*, iv. 2.

<sup>2</sup> In the *Gentleman Dancing-Master*.

which is never absent in England, and gives a peculiar character to their virtues as well as to their vices. When we have removed the oratorical and heavily constructed phrases imitated from the French, we get at the genuine English talent—a deep sympathy with nature and life. Wycherley possessed that lucid and vigorous perspicacity which in any particular situation seizes upon gesture, physical expression, evident detail, which pierces to the depths of the crude and base, which hits off, not men in general, and passion as it ought to be, but an individual man, and passion as it is. He is a realist, not of set purpose, as the realists of our day, but naturally. In a violent manner he lays on his plaster over the grinning and pimpled faces of his rascals, in order to bring before our very eyes the stern mask to which the living imprint of their ugliness has stuck on the way. He crams his plays with incident, he multiplies action, he pushes comedy to the verge of dramatic effect; he hustles his characters amidst surprises and violence, and all but stultifies them in order to exaggerate his satire. Observe in Olivia, a copy of Célimène, the fury of the passions which he depicts. She describes her friends as does Célimène, but with what insults! Novel, a coxcomb, says:

“Madam, I have been treated to-day with all the ceremony and kindness imaginable at my lady Autumn’s. But the nauseous old woman at the upper end of her table’ . . .

*Olivia*: “Revives the old Grecian custom, of serving in a death’s head with their banquets. . . . I detest her hollow cherry cheeks: she looks like an old coach new painted. . . . She is still most splendidly, gallantly ugly, and looks like an ill piece of daubing in a rich frame.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Plain Dealer*, ii. 1.

The scene is borrowed from Molière's *Misanthrope* and the *Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes*; but how transformed! Our modern nerves would not endure the portrait Olivia draws of Manly, her lover; he hears her unawares; she forthwith stands before him, laughs at him to his face, declares herself to be married; tells him she means to keep the diamonds which he has given her, and defies him. Fidelia says to her:

"But, madam, what could make you dissemble love to him, when 'twas so hard a thing for you; and flatter his love to you?"

*Olivia.* "That which makes all the world flatter and dissemble, 'twas his money: I had a real passion for that. . . . As soon as I had his money, I hastened his departure like a wife, who when she has made the most of a dying husband's breath, pulls away his pillow."<sup>1</sup>

The last phrase is rather that of a morose satirist than of an accurate observer. The woman's impudence is like a professed courtesan's. In love at first sight with Fidelia, whom she takes for a young man, she hangs upon her neck, "stuffs her with kisses," gropes about in the dark, crying, "Where are thy lips?" There is a kind of animal ferocity in her love. She sends her husband off by an improvised comedy; then skipping about like a dancing girl cries out: "Go, husband, and come up, friend; just the buckets in the well; the absence of one brings the other." "But I hope, like them too, they will not meet in the way, jostle, and clash together."<sup>2</sup> Surprised in *flagrante delicto*, and having confessed all to her cousin, as soon as she sees a chance of safety, she swallows her avowal with the effrontery of an actress:—

<sup>1</sup> *The Plain Dealer*, iv. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



" *Eliza.* Well, cousin, this, I confess, was reasonable hypocrisy ; you were the better for 't.

*Olivia.* What hypocrisy !

*E.* Why, this last deceit of your husband was lawful, since in your own defence.

*O.* What deceit ? I'd have you know I never deceived my husband.

*E.* You do not understand me, sure ; I say, this was an honest come-off, and a good one. But 'twas a sign your gallant had had enough of your conversation, since he could so dexterously cheat your husband in passing for a woman.

*O.* What d'ye mean, once more, with my gallant, and passing for a woman ?

*E.* What do you mean ? you see your husband took him for a woman !

*O.* Whom ?

*E.* Heyday ! why, the man he found with. . . .

*O.* Lord, you rave sure !

*E.* Why, did you not tell me last night. . . . Fy, this fooling is so insipid, 'tis offensive.

*O.* And fooling with my honour will be more offensive. . . .

*E.* O admirable confidence ! . . .

*O.* Confidence, to me ! to me such language ! nay, then I'll never see your face again. . . . Lettice, where are you ? Let us begone from this censorious ill woman. . . .

*E.* One word first, pray, madam ; can you swear that whom your husband found you with. . . .

*O.* Swear ! ay, that whosoever 'twas that stole up, unknown, into my room, when 'twas dark, I know not, whether man or woman, by heavens, by all that's good ; or, may I never more have joys here, or in the other world ! Nay, may I eternally—

*E.* Be damned. So, so, you are damned enough already by your oaths. . . . Yet take this advice with you, in this plain-dealing age, to leave off forswearing yourself. . . .

O. O hideous, hideous advice ! let us go out of the hearing of it. She will spoil us, Lettice." <sup>1</sup>

Here is animation ; and if I dared to relate the boldness and the asseveration in the night scene, it would easily appear that Mme. Marneffe<sup>2</sup> had a sister, and Balzac a predecessor.

There is a character who shows in a concise manner Wycherley's talent and his morality, wholly formed of energy and indelicacy,— Manly, the "plain dealer," so manifestly the author's favourite, that his contemporaries gave him the name of his hero for a surname. Manly is copied after Alceste, and the great difference between the two heroes shows the difference between the two societies and the two countries.<sup>3</sup> Manly is not a courtier, but a ship-captain, with the bearing of a sailor of the time, his cloak stained with tar, and smelling of brandy,<sup>4</sup> ready with blows or foul oaths, calling those he came across dogs and slaves, and when they displeased him, kicking them down stairs. And he speaks in this fashion to a lord with a voice like a mastiff. Then, when the poor nobleman tries to whisper something in his ear, " My lord, all that you have made me know by your whispering which I knew not before, is that you

<sup>1</sup> *The Plain Dealer*, v. 1

<sup>2</sup> See note, vol. i. page 41.

<sup>3</sup> Compare with the sayings of Alceste, in Molière's *Misanthrope*, such tirades as this : " Such as you, like common whores and pick-pockets, are only dangerous to those you embrace." And with the character of Philinte, in the same French play, such phrases as these : " But, faith, could you think I was a friend to those I hugged, kissed, flattered, bowed to ! When their backs were turned, did not I tell you they were rogues, villains, rascals, whom I despised and hated ? "

<sup>4</sup> Olivia says : " Then shall I have again my alcove smell like a cabin, my chamber perfumed with his tarpaulin Brandenburg ; and hear volleys of brandy-sighs, enough to make a fog in one's room." — *The Plain Dealer*, ii. 1.

have a stinking breath ; there's a secret for your secret." When he is in Olivia's drawing-room, with "these fluttering parrots of the town, these apes, these echoes of men," he bawls out as if he were on his quarter-deck, "Peace, you Bartholomew fair buffoons!" He seizes them by the collar, and says: "Why, you impudent, pitiful wretches, . . . you are in all things so like women, that you may think it in me a kind of cowardice to beat you. Begone, I say. . . . No chattering, baboons ; instantly begone, or" . . . Then he turns them out of the room. These are the manners of a plain-dealing man. He has been ruined by Olivia, whom he loves, and who dismisses him. Poor Fidelia, disguised as a man, and whom he takes for a timid youth, comes and finds him while he is fretting with anger :

"*Fidelia.* I warrant you, sir ; for, at worst, I could beg or steal for you.

*Manly.* Nay, more bragging ! . . . You said you'd beg for me.

*F.* I did, sir.

*M.* Then you shall beg for me.

*F.* With all my heart, sir.

*M.* That is, pimp for me.

*F.* How, sir ?

*M.* D'ye start ? . . . No more dissembling : here (I say,) you must go use it for me to Olivia. . . . Go, flatter, lie, kneel, promise, anything to get her for me : I cannot live unless I have her." <sup>1</sup>

And when Fidelia returns to him, saying that Olivia has embraced her, by force, in a fit of love, he exclaims ; "Her love !—a whore's, a witch's love !—

<sup>1</sup> *The Plain Dealer*, iii. 1.

But what, did she not kiss well, sir? I'm sure, I thought her lips—but I must not think of 'em more—but yet they are such I could still kiss,—grow to,—and then tear off with my teeth, grind 'em into mammocks, and spit 'em into her cuckold's face.”<sup>1</sup> These savage words indicate savage actions. He goes by night to enter Olivia's house with Fidelia, and under her name; and Fidelia tries to prevent him, through jealousy. Then his blood boils, a storm of fury mounts to his face, and he speaks to her in a whispering, hissing voice: “What, you are my rival, then! and therefore you shall stay, and keep the door for me, whilst I go in for you; but when I'm gone, if you dare to stir off from this very board, or breathe the least murmuring accent, I'll cut her throat first; and if you love her, you will not venture her life.—Nay, then I'll cut your throat too, and I know you love your own life at least. . . . Not a word more, lest I begin my revenge on her by killing you.”<sup>2</sup> He knocks over Olivia's husband, another traitor seizes from her the casket of jewels he had given her, casts her one or two of them, saying, “Here, madam, I never yet left my wench unpaid,” and gives this same casket to Fidelia, whom he marries. All these actions then appeared natural. Wycherley took to himself in his dedication the title of his hero, *Plain Dealer*; he fancied he had drawn the portrait of a frank, honest man, and praised himself for having set the public a fine example; he had only given them the model of an unreserved and energetic brute. That was all the manliness that was left in this pitiable world. Wycherley deprived man of his ill-fitting French cloak,

<sup>1</sup> *The Plain Dealer*, iv. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iv. 2.



and displayed him with his framework of muscles, and in his naked shamelessness.

And in the midst of all these, a great poet, blind, and sunk into obscurity, his soul saddened by the misery of the times, thus depicted the madness of the infernal rout :

“ Belial came last, than whom a spirit more lewd  
Fell not from heaven, or more gross to love  
Vice for itself . . . who more oft than he  
In temples and at altars, when the priest  
Turns atheist, as did Eli’s sons, who fill’d  
With lust and violence the house of God ?  
In courts and palaces he also reigns,  
And in luxurious cities, where the noise  
Of riot ascends above their loftiest towers,  
And injury, and outrage : and when night  
Darkens the streets, then wander forth the sons  
Of Belial, flown with insolence and wine.”<sup>1</sup>

## 2. THE WORLDLINGS.

### I.

In the seventeenth century a new mode of life was inaugurated in Europe, the worldly, which soon took the lead of and shaped every other. In France especially, and in England, it appeared and gained ground, from the same causes and at the same time.

In order to people the drawing-rooms, a certain political condition is necessary ; and this condition, which is the supremacy of the king in combination with a regular system of police, was established at the same period on both sides of the Channel. A regular police brings about peace among men, draws them out of their

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, book i. l. 490-502.

feudal independence and provincial isolation, increases and facilitates intercommunication, confidence, union, comfort, and pleasures. The kingly supremacy calls into existence a court, the centre of intercourse, from which all favours flow, and which calls for a display of pleasure and splendour. The aristocracy thus attracted to one another, and attracted to the throne by security, curiosity, amusement, and interest, meet together, and become at once men of the world and men of the court. They are no longer, like the barons of a preceding age, standing in their lofty halls, armed and stern, possessed by the idea that they might perhaps, when they quit their palace, cut each other to pieces, and that if they fall to blows in the precincts of the court, the executioner is ready to cut off their hand and stop the bleeding with a red-hot iron; knowing, moreover, that the king may probably have them beheaded to-morrow, and ready accordingly to cast themselves on their knees and break out into protestations of submissive fidelity, but counting under their breath the number of swords that will be mustered on their side, and the trusty men who keep sentinel behind the drawbridge of their castles.<sup>1</sup> The rights, privileges, constraints, and attractions of feudal life have disappeared. There is no more need that the manor should be a fortress. These men can no longer experience the joy of reigning there as in a petty state. It has palled on them, and they quit it. Having no further cause to quarrel with the king, they go to him. His court is a drawing-room, most agreeable to the sight, and most serviceable to those who frequent it. Here are festivities, splendid furniture, a decked and

<sup>1</sup> Consult all Shakespeare's historical plays.

select company, news and tittle-tattle ; here they find pensions, titles, places for themselves and their friends ; they receive amusement and profit ; it is all gain and all pleasure. Here they attend the levée, are present at dinners, return to the ball, sit down to play, are there when the king goes to bed. Here they cut a dash with their half-French dress, their wigs, their hats loaded with feathers, their trunk-hose, their cannions, the large rosettes on their shoes. The ladies paint and patch their faces, display robes of magnificent satin and velvet, laced up with silver and very long, and above you may see their white busts, whose brilliant nakedness is extended to their shoulders and arms. They are gazed upon, saluted, approached. The king rides on horseback in Hyde Park ; by his side canter the queen, and with her the two mistresses, Lady Castlemaine and Mrs. Stewart : "the queen in a white-laced waistcoate and a crimson short petticoate, and her hair dressed *à la négligence* ; . . . Mrs. Stewart with her hat cocked and a red plume, with her sweet eye, little Roman nose, and excellent taille."<sup>1</sup> Then they returned to Whitehall "where all the ladies walked, talking and fiddling with their hats and feathers, and changing and trying one another's by one another's heads, and laughing."<sup>2</sup> In such fine company there was no lack of gallantry. Perfumed gloves, pocket mirrors, work-cases fitted up, apricot paste, essences, and other little love-tokens, came over every week from Paris. London furnished more substantial gifts, ear-rings, diamonds, brilliants, and golden guineas ; the fair ones put up with these, as if they had come from a greater distance.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Pepys' Diary*, ii. July 13, 1663.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Mémoires de Grammont*, by A. Hamilton.

There were plenty of intrigues—Heaven knows how many or of what kind. Naturally, also, conversation does not stop. They did not mince the adventures of Miss Warmestré the haughty, who, “deceived apparently by a bad reckoning, took the liberty of lying-in in the midst of the court.”<sup>1</sup> They spoke in whispers about the attempts of Miss Hobart, or the happy misfortune of Miss Churchill, who, being very plain, but having the wit to fall from her horse, touched the eyes and heart of the Duke of York. The Chevalier de Grammont relates to the king the history of Termes, or of Poussatin the almoner: every one leaves the dance to hear it; and when it is over, they all burst out laughing. We perceive that this is not the world of Louis XIV., and yet it is a world; and if it has more froth, it runs with the identical current. The great object here also is selfish amusement, and to put on appearances; people strive to be men of fashion; a coat bestows a certain kind of glory on its wearer. De Grammont was in despair when the roguery of his valet obliged him to wear the same suit twice over. Another courtier piques himself on his songs and his guitar-playing. “Russell had a collection of two or three hundred quadrilles in tablature, all of which he used to dance without ever having studied them.” Jermyn was known for his success with the fair. “A gentleman,” said Etherege, “ought to dress well, dance well, fence well, have a talent for love-letters, a pleasant voice in a room, to be always very amorous, sufficiently discreet, but not too constant.” These are already the court manners as they continued in France up to the time of Louis XVI. With such manners, words take

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires de Grammont*, by A. Hamilton. ch. ix.

the place of deeds. Life is passed in visits and conversation. The art of conversing became the chief of all ; of course, to converse agreeably, to fill up an idle hour, on twenty subjects in an hour, hinting always, without going deep, in such a fashion that conversation should not be a labour, but a promenade. It was followed up by letters written in the evening, by madrigals or epigrams to be read in the morning, by drawing-room tragedies, or caricatures of society. In this manner a new literature was produced, the work and the portrait of the world which was at once its audience and its model, which sprung from it, and ended in it.

## II.

The art of conversation being then a necessity, people set themselves to acquire it. A revolution was effected in mind as well as in manners. As soon as circumstances assume new aspects, thought assumes a new form. The Renaissance is ended, the Classic Age begins, and the artist makes room for the author. Man is returned from his first voyage round the world of facts ; enthusiasm, the labour of a troubled imagination, the tumultuous crowding of new ideas, all the faculties which a first discovery calls into play, have become satiated, then depressed. The incentive is blunted, because the work is done. The eccentricities, the far vistas, the unbridled originality, the all-powerful flights of genius aimed at the centre of truth through the extremes of folly, all the characteristics of grand inventive genius have disappeared. The imagination is tempered ; the mind is disciplined : it retraces its steps ; it walks its own domain once more with a

satisfied curiosity, an acquired experience. Judgment, as it were, chews the cud and corrects itself. It finds a religion, an art, a philosophy, to reform or to form anew. It is no longer the minister of inspired intuition, but of a regular process of decomposition. It no longer feels or looks for generalities; it handles and observes specialties. It selects and classifies; it refines and regulates. It ceases to be a creator, and becomes a discourser. It quits the province of invention and settles down into criticism. It enters upon that magnificent and confused aggregate of dogmas and forms, in which the preceding age has gathered up indiscriminately its dreams and discoveries; it draws thence the ideas which it modifies and verifies. It arranges them in long chains of simple ratiocination, which descend link by link to the vulgar apprehension. It expresses them in exact terms, which present a graduated series, step by step, to the vulgar reasoning power. It marks out in the entire field of thought a series of compartments and a network of passages, which, excluding all error and digression, lead gradually every mind to every object. It becomes at last clear, convenient, charming. And the world lends its aid; contingent circumstances finish the natural revolution; the taste becomes changed through a declivity of its own, but also through the influence of the court. When conversation becomes the chief business of life, it modifies style after its own image, and according to its peculiar needs. It repudiates digression, excessive metaphor, impassioned exclamations, all loose and overstrained ways. We cannot bawl, gesticulate, dream aloud, in a drawing-room; we restrain ourselves; we criticise and keep watch over ourselves; we pass the time in narration and dis-



cussion ; we stand in need of concise expression, exact language, clear and connected reasoning ; otherwise we cannot fence or comprehend each other. Correct style, good language, conversation, are self-generated, and very quickly perfected ; for refinement is the aim of the man of the world : he studies to render everything more becoming and more serviceable, his furniture and his speech, his periods and his dress. Art and artifice are there the distinguishing mark. People pride themselves on being perfect in their mother tongue, never to miss the correct sense of any word, to avoid vulgar expressions, to string together their antitheses, to develop their thoughts, to employ rhetoric. Nothing is more marked than the contrast of the conversations of Shakspeare and Fletcher with those of Wycherley and Congreve. In Shakspeare the dialogue resembles an assault of arms ; we could imagine men of skill fencing with words and gestures as it were in a fencing-school. They play the buffoon, sing, think aloud, burst out into a laugh, into puns, into fishwomen's talk and into poet's talk, into quaint whimsicalities ; they have a taste for the ridiculous, the sparkling ; one of them dances while he speaks ; they would willingly walk on their hands ; there is not one grain of calculation to more than three grains of folly in their heads. In Wycherley, on the other hand, the characters are steady ; they reason and dispute ; ratiocination is the basis of their style ; they are so perfect that the thing is overdone, and we see through it all the author stringing his phrases. They arrange a tableau, multiply ingenious comparisons, balance well-ordered periods. One character delivers a satire, another serves up a little essay on morality. We might draw from the comedies of the time a

volume of sentences ; they are charged with literary morsels which foreshadow the *Spectator*.<sup>1</sup> They hunt for clever and suitable expressions, they clothe indecent circumstances with decent words ; they glide swiftly over the fragile ice of decorum, and scratch the surface without breaking it. I see gentlemen, seated in gilt arm-chairs, of quiet wit and studied speech, cool in observation, eloquent sceptics, expert in the fashions, lovers of elegance, liking fine talk as much from vanity as from taste, who, while conversing between a compliment and a reverence, will no more neglect their good style than their neat gloves or their hat.

### III.

Amongst the best and most agreeable specimens of this new refinement, appears Sir William Temple, a diplomatist and man of the world, cautious, prudent, and polite, gifted with tact in conversation and in business, expert in the knowledge of the times, and in the art of not compromising himself, adroit in pressing forward and in standing aside, who knew how to attract to himself the favour and the expectations of England, to obtain the eulogies of men of letters, of savants, of politicians, of the people, to gain a European reputation, to win all the crowns appropriated to science, patriotism, virtue, genius, without having too much of science, patriotism, genius, or virtue. Such a life is the masterpiece of that age : fine externals on a foundation not so fine ; this is its abstract. His manner as an author agrees with his maxims as a politician. His principles and style are homogeneous ; a genuine diplomatist, such

<sup>1</sup> Take, for example, Farquhar's *Beaux Stratagem*, ii. 1.

as one meets in the drawing-rooms, having probed Europe and touched everywhere the bottom of things; tired of everything, specially of enthusiasm, admirable in an arm-chair or at a levee, a good story-teller, waggish if need were, but in moderation, accomplished in the art of maintaining the dignity of his station and of enjoying himself. In his retreat at Sheen, afterwards at Moor Park, he employs his leisure in writing; and he writes as a man of his rank would speak, very well, that is to say, with dignity and facility, particularly when he writes of the countries he has visited, of the incidents he has seen, the noble amusements which serve to pass his time.<sup>1</sup> He has an income of fifteen hundred a year, and a nice sinecure in Ireland. He retired from public life during momentous struggles, siding neither with the king nor against him, resolved, as he tells us himself, not to set himself against the current when the current is irresistible. He lives peacefully in the country with his wife, his sister, his secretary, his dependants, receiving the visits of strangers, who are anxious to see the negotiator of the Triple Alliance, and sometimes of the new King William, who unable to obtain his services, comes occasionally to seek his counsel. He plants and gardens, in a fertile soil, in a country the climate of which agrees with him, amongst regular flower-beds, by the side of a very straight canal, bordered by a straight terrace; and he lauds himself in set terms, and with suitable discreetness, for the character he possesses and the part he has chosen:—"I have often wondered how such sharp and violent invectives come to be made

<sup>1</sup> Consult especially, *Observations upon the United Provinces of the Netherlands; Of Gardening.*

so generally against Epicurus, by the ages that followed him, whose admirable wit, felicity of expression, excellence of nature, sweetness of conversation, temperance of life and constancy of death, made him so beloved by his friends, admired by his scholars, and honoured by the Athenians.”<sup>1</sup> He does well to defend Epicurus, because he has followed his precepts, avoiding every great confusion of the mind, and installing himself, like one of Lucretius’ gods, in the interspace of worlds; as he says: “Where factions were once entered and rooted in a state, they thought it madness for good men to meddle with public affairs.” And again: “The true service of the public is a business of so much labour and so much care, that though a good and wise man may not refuse it, if he be called to it by his prince or his country, and thinks he may be of more than vulgar use, yet he will seldom or never seek it; but leaves it commonly to men who, under the disguise of public good, pursue their own designs of wealth, power, and such bastard honours as usually attend them, not that which is the true, and only true, reward of virtue.”<sup>2</sup> This is how he ushers himself in. Thus presented to us, he goes on to talk of the gardening which he practises, and first of the six grand Epicureans who have illustrated the doctrine of their master—Cæsar, Atticus, Lucretius, Horace, Mæcenas, Virgil; then of the various sorts of gardens which have a name in the world, from the garden of Eden, and the garden of Alcinous, to those of Holland and Italy; and all this at some length, like a man who listens to himself and is listened to by others, who does rather profusely the honours of his house and of his wit to

<sup>1</sup> Temple’s Works: *Of Gardening*, ii. 190.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 184.

his guests, but does them with grace and dignity, not dogmatically nor haughtily, but in varied tones, aptly modulating his voice and gestures. He recounts the four kinds of grapes which he has introduced into England, and confesses that he has been extravagant, yet does not regret it; for five years he has not once wished to see London. He intersperses technical advice with anecdotes; whereof one relates to Charles II., who praised the English climate above all others, saying: "He thought that was the best climate, where he could be abroad in the air with pleasure, or at least without trouble or inconvenience, most days of the year, and most hours of the day." Another about the Bishop of Munster, who, unable to grow anything but cherries in his orchard, had collected all varieties, and so perfected the trees that he had fruit from May to September. The reader feels an inward gratification when he hears an eyewitness relate minute details of such great men. Our attention is aroused immediately; we in consequence imagine ourselves denizens of the court, and smile complacently; no matter if the details be slender they serve passably well, they constitute "a half hour with the aristocracy," like a lordly way of taking snuff, or shaking the lace of one's ruffles. Such is the interest of courtly conversation; it can be held about nothing; the excellence of the manner lends this nothing a peculiar charm; you hear the sound of the voice, you are amused by the half smile, abandon yourself to the fluent stream, forget that these are ordinary ideas; you observe the narrator, his peculiar breeches, the cane he toys with, the be-ribboned shoes, his easy walk over the smooth gravel of his garden paths between the faultless hedges;

the ear, the mind even is charmed, captivated by the appropriateness of his diction, by the abundance of his ornate periods, by the dignity and fulness of a style which is involuntarily regular, which, at first artificial, like good breeding, ends, like true good breeding, by being changed into a real necessity and a natural talent.

Unfortunately, this talent occasionally leads to blunders; when a man speaks well about everything, he thinks he has a right to speak of everything. He plays the philosopher, the critic, even the man of learning; and indeed becomes so actually, at least with the ladies. Such a man writes, like Temple, *Essays on the Nature of Government*, on *Heroic Virtue*,<sup>1</sup> on *Poetry*; that is, little treatises on society, on the beautiful, on the philosophy of history. He is the Locke, the Herder, the Bentley of the drawing-room, and nothing else. Now and then, doubtless, his mother wit leads him to fair original judgments. Temple was the first to discover a Pindaric glow in the old chant of Ragnar Lodbrog, and to place Don Quixote in the first rank of modern fictions; moreover, when he handles a subject within his range, like the causes of the power and decline of the Turks, his reasoning is admirable. But otherwise, he is simply a tyro; nay, in him the pedant crops out, and the worst of pedants, who, being ignorant, wishes to seem wise, who quotes the history of every land, hauling in Jupiter, Saturn, Osiris, Fo-hi, Confucius, Manco-Capac, Mahomet, and discourses on all these obscure and unknown civilisations, as if he had laboriously studied them, at the fountain head and not at

<sup>1</sup> Compare this essay with that of Carlyle, on *Heroes and Hero-Worship*; the title and subject are similar; it is curious to note the difference of the two centuries.

second hand, through the extracts of his secretary, or the books of others. One day he came to grief; having plunged into a literary dispute, and claimed superiority for the ancients over the moderns, he imagined himself a Hellenist, an antiquarian, related the voyages of Pythagoras, the education of Orpheus, and remarked that the Greek sages “were commonly excellent poets, and great physicians: they were so learned in natural philosophy, that they foretold not only eclipses in the heavens, but earthquakes at land and storms at sea, great droughts and great plagues, much plenty or much scarcity of certain sorts of fruits or grain; not to mention the magical powers attributed to several of them, to allay storms, to raise gales, to appease commotions of people, to make plagues cease.”<sup>1</sup> Admirable faculties, which we no longer possess. Again he regretted the decay of music, “by which men and beasts, fishes, fowls, and serpents, were so frequently enchanted, and their very natures changed; by which the passions of men were raised to the greatest height and violence, and then as suddenly appeased, so as they might be justly said to be turned into lions or lambs, into wolves or into harts, by the powers and charms of this admirable art.”<sup>2</sup> He wished to enumerate the greatest modern writers, and forgot to mention in his catalogue, “amongst the Italians, Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, and Tasso; in his list of French, Pascal, Bossuet, Molière, Corneille, Racine, and Boileau; in his list of Spaniards, Lope and Calderon; and in his list of English, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton;”<sup>3</sup> though, by way of compensation, he inserted

<sup>1</sup> Temple's Works, ii.: *An Essay upon the Ancient and Modern Learning*, 155. <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 165.

<sup>3</sup> Macaulay's Works, vi. 319: *Essay on Sir William Temple*.

the names of Paolo Sarpi, Guevara, Sir Philip Sidney, Selden, Voiture, and Bussy-Rabutin, “author of the *Histoire amoureuse des Gaules*.” To cap all, he declared the fables of *Æsop*, which are a dull Byzantine compilation, and the letters of Phalaris, a wretched sophistical forgery, to be admirable and authentic:—“It may perhaps be further affirmed, in favour of the ancients, that the oldest books we have are still in their kind the best. The two most ancient that I know of in prose, among those we call profane authors, are *Æsop’s Fables* and Phalaris’ *Epistles*, both living near the same time, which was that of Cyrus and Pythagoras. As the first has been agreed by all ages since for the greatest master in his kind, and all others of that sort have been but imitations of his original; so I think the *Epistles of Phalaris* to have more grace, more spirit, more force of wit and genius, than any others I have ever seen, either ancient or modern.” And then, in order to commit himself beyond remedy, he gravely remarked: “I know several learned men (or that usually pass for such, under the name of critics) have not esteemed them genuine, and Politian with some others have attributed them to Lucian; but I think he must have little skill in painting that cannot find out this to be an original: such diversity of passions, upon such variety of actions and passages of life and government, such freedom of thought, such boldness of expression, such bounty to his friends, such scorn of his enemies, such honour of learned men, such esteem of good, such knowledge of life, such contempt of death, with such fierceness of nature and cruelty of revenge, could never be represented but by him that possessed them; and I esteem Lucian to have been no more capable of writing than of acting what Phalaris did.

In all one writ, you find the scholar or the sophist ; and in all the other, the tyrant and the commander.”<sup>1</sup>

Fine rhetoric truly ; it is sad that a passage so aptly turned should cover so many stupidities. All this appeared very triumphant ; and the universal applause with which this fine oratorical bombast was greeted demonstrates the taste and the culture, the hollowness and the politeness, of the elegant world of which Temple was the marvel, and which, like Temple, loved only the varnish of truth.

#### IV.

Such were the ornate and polished manners which gradually pierce through debauchery and assume the ascendant. Gradually the current grows clearer, and marks out its course, like a stream, which forcibly entering a new bed, moves with difficulty at first through a heap of mud, then pushes forward its still murky waters, which are purified little by little. These debauchees try to be men of the world, and sometimes succeed in it. Wycherley writes well, very clearly, without the least trace of euphuism, almost in the French manner. He makes Dapperwit say of Lucy, in measured phrase, “She is beautiful without affectation, amorous without impertinence, . . . frolic without rudeness.”<sup>2</sup> When he wishes it he is ingenious, and his gentlemen exchange happy comparisons. “Mistresses,” says one, “are like books : if you pore upon them too much, they doze you, and make you unfit for company ; but if used discreetly, you are the fitter for conversation by ‘em.” “Yes,” says another, “a mistress should be

<sup>1</sup> *An Essay upon the Ancient and Modern Learning*, 172.

<sup>2</sup> *Love in a Wood*, iii. 2.

like a little country retreat near the town ; not to dwell in constantly, but only for a night and away, to taste the town the better when a man returns.”<sup>1</sup> These folk have style, even out of place, often not in accordance with the situation or condition of the persons. A shoemaker in one of Etherege’s plays says : “ There is never a man in the town lives more like a gentleman with his wife than I do. I never mind her motions ; she never inquires into mine. We speak to one another civilly, hate one another heartily.” There is perfect art in this little speech ; everything is complete, even to the symmetrical antithesis of words, ideas, sounds : what a fine talker is this same satirical shoemaker ! After a satire, a madrigal. In one place a certain character exclaims, in the very middle of a dialogue, and in sober prose, “ Pretty pouting lips, with a little moisture hanging on them, that look like the Provence rose fresh on the bush, ere the morning sun has quite drawn up the dew.” Is not this the graceful gallantry of the court ? Rochester himself sometimes might furnish a parallel. Two or three of his songs are still to be found in the expurgated books of extracts in use amongst modest young girls. It matters nothing that such men are really scamps ; they must be every moment using compliments and salutations : before women whom they wish to seduce they are compelled to warble tender words and insipidities : they acknowledge but one check, the necessity to appear well-bred ; yet this check suffices to restrain them. Rochester is correct even in the midst of his filth ; if he talks lewdly, it is in the able and exact manner of Boileau. All these roisterers aim at being wits and men of the world. Sir Charles Sedley

<sup>1</sup> *The Country Wife*, i. 1.

ruins and pollutes himself, but Charles II. calls him “the viceroy of Apollo.” Buckingham extols “the magic of his style.” He is the most charming, the most sought-after of talkers; he makes puns and verses, always agreeable, sometimes refined; he handles dexterously the pretty jargon of mythology; he insinuates into his airy, flowing verses all the dainty and somewhat affected prettinesses of the drawing-room. He sings thus to Chloris :

“ My passion with your beauty grew,  
While Cupid at my heart,  
Still as his mother favour’d you,  
Threw a new flaming dart.”

And then sums up :

“ Each glорied in their wanton part :  
To make a lover, he  
Employ’d the utmost of his art ;  
To make a beauty, she.”<sup>1</sup>

There is no love whatever in these pretty things; they are received as they are presented, with a smile; they form part of the conventional language, the polite attentions due from gentlemen to ladies. I suppose they would send them in the morning with a nosegay, or a box of preserved fruits. Roscommon indites some verses on a dead lapdog, on a young lady’s cold; this naughty cold prevents her singing — cursed be the winter! And hereupon he takes the winter to task, abuses it at length. Here you have the literary amusements of the worldling. They first treat love, then

<sup>1</sup> Sir Charles Sedley’s Works, ed. Briscoe, 1778, 2 vols.: *The Merry Garden*, ii.

danger, most airily and gaily. On the eve of a naval contest, Dorset, at sea, amidst the pitching of his vessel, addresses a celebrated song to the ladies. There is nothing weighty in it, either sentiment or wit; people hum the couplets as they pass; they emit a gleam of gaiety; the next moment they are forgotten. Dorset at sea writes to the ladies, on the night before an engagement:

“Let’s hear of no inconstancy,  
We have too much of *that at sea*.”

And again:

“Should foggy Opdam chance to know  
Our sad and dismal story,  
The Dutch would scorn so weak a foe,  
And quit their fort at Goree.  
For what resistance can they find  
From men who’ve left their hearts behind?”

Then come jests too much in the English style:

“Then if we write not by each post,  
Think not we are unkind; . . .  
Our tears we’ll send a speedier way;  
The tide shall bring them twice a day.”

Such tears can hardly flow from sorrow; the lady regards them as the lover sheds them, good-naturedly. She is “at a play” (he thinks so, and tells her so):

“Whilst you, regardless of our woe,  
Sit careless at a play,  
Perhaps permit some happier man  
To kiss your hand, or flirt your fan.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Works of the Earls of Rochester, Boscawen, and Dorset*, 2 vols., 1731, ii. 54.

Dorset hardly troubles himself about it, plays with poetry without excess or assiduity, just as it flows, writing to-day a verse against Dorinda, to-morrow a satire against Mr. Howard, always easily and without study, like a true gentleman. He is an earl, lord-chamberlain, and rich ; he pensions and patronises poets as he would flirts—to amuse himself, without binding himself. The Duke of Buckingham does the same, and also the contrary ; caresses one poet, parodies another ; is flattered, mocked, and ends by having his portrait taken by Dryden—a *chef d'œuvre*, but not flattering. We have seen such pastimes and such bickerings in France ; we find here the same manners and the same literature, because we find here also the same society and the same spirit.

Among these poets, and in the front rank, is Edmund Waller, who lived and wrote in this manner to his eighty-second year : a man of wit and fashion, well-bred, familiar from his youth with great people, endued with tact and foresight, quick at repartee, not easy to put out of countenance, but selfish, with hardly any feelings, having changed sides more than once, and bearing very well the memory of his tergiversations ; in short, a good model of the worldling and the courtier. It was he who, having once praised Cromwell, and afterwards Charles II., but the latter more feebly than the former, said by way of excuse : “ Poets, your Majesty, succeed better in fiction than in truth.” In this kind of existence, three-quarters of the poetry is written for the occasion ; it is the small change of conversation or flattery ; it resembles the little events or the little sentiments from which it sprang. One piece is written “ Of Tea,” another on the queen’s portrait ; it is necessary

to pay court; moreover "His Majesty has requested some verses." One lady makes him a present of a silver pen, straight he throws his gratitude into ryhme; another has the power of sleeping at will, straight a sportive stanza; a false report is spread of her being painted, straight a copy of verses on this grave affair. A little further on there are verses to the Countess of Carlisle on her chamber, condolences to my Lord of Northumberland on the death of his wife, a pretty thing on a lady "passing through a crowd of people," an answer, verse for verse, to some rhymes of Sir John Suckling. He seizes anything frivolous, new, or becoming on the wing; and his poetry is only a written conversation,—I mean the conversation which goes on at a ball, when people speak for the sake of speaking, lifting a lock of one's wig, or twisting about a glove. Gallantry holds the chief place here, as it ought to do, and we may be pretty certain that the love is not over-sincere. In reality, Waller sighs on purpose (Sacharissa had a fine dowry), or at least for the sake of good manners: that which is most evident in his tender poems is, that he aims at a flowing style and good rhymes. He is affected, he exaggerates, he strains after wit, he is always an author. Not venturing to address Sacharissa herself, he addresses Mrs. Braughton, her attendant, "his fellow-servant:"

"So, in those nations which the Sun adore,  
Some modest Persian, or some weak-eyed Moor,  
No higher dares advance his dazzled sight  
Than to some gilded cloud, which near the light  
Of their ascending god adorns the east,  
And, graced with his beam, outshines the rest."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The English Poets*, ed. A. Chalmers, 21 vols., 1810; Waller, vol. viii. 44.

A fine comparison! That is a well-made courtesy; I hope Sacharissa responds with one equally correct. His despairs bear the same flavour; he pierces the groves of Penshurst with his cries, "reports his flame to the beeches," and the well-bred beeches "bow their heads, as if they felt the same."<sup>1</sup> It is probable that, in these mournful walks, his greatest care was lest he should wet the soles of his high-heeled shoes. These transports of love bring in the classical machinery, Apollo and the Muses. Apollo is annoyed that one of his servants is ill-treated, and bids him depart; and he departs, telling Sacharissa that she is harder than an oak, and that she was certainly produced from a rock.<sup>2</sup>

There is one genuine reality in all this—sensuality; not ardent, but light and gay. There is a certain piece, "The Fall," which an abbé of the court of Louis XV. might have written:

<sup>1</sup> "Then blush not, Fair! or on him frown, . . .  
How could the youth, alas! but bend  
When his whole Heav'n upon him lean'd;

<sup>1</sup> *The English Poets*, Waller, viii. 44.

<sup>2</sup> "While in this park I sing, the list'ning deer  
Attend my passion, and forget to fear;  
When to the beeches I report my flame,  
They bow their heads, as if they felt the same.  
To gods appealing, when I reach their bow'r's  
With loud complaints, they answer me in showers.  
To thee a wild and cruel soul is giv'n,  
More deaf than trees, and prouder than the heav'n!  
    . . . The rock,  
That cloven rock, produc'd thee. . . .  
This last complaint th' indulgent ears did pierce  
Of just Apollo, president of verse;  
Highly concerned that the Muse should bring  
Damage to one whom he had taught to sing."—*Ibid.* p. 44-5.

If aught by him amiss were done,  
 'Twas that he let you rise so soon."<sup>1</sup>

Other pieces smack of their surroundings, and are not so polished :

" Amoret ! as sweet as good,  
 As the most delicious food,  
 Which but tasted does impart  
 Life and gladness to the heart."<sup>2</sup>

I should not be pleased, were I a woman, to be compared to a beef-steak, though that be appetising ; nor should I like any more to find myself, like Sacharissa, placed on a level with good wine, which flies to the head :

" Sacharissa's beauty's wine,  
 Which to madness doth incline ;  
 Such a liquor as no brain  
 That is mortal can sustain."<sup>3</sup>

This is too much honour for port wine and meat. The English back-ground crops up here and elsewhere ; for example, the beautiful Sacharissa, having ceased to be beautiful, asked Waller if he would again write verses for her : he answered, " Yes, madame, when you are once more as young and as handsome as you were." Here is something to shock a Frenchman. Nevertheless Waller is usually amiable ; a sort of brilliant light floats like a halo round his verses ; he is always elegant, often graceful. His gracefulness is like the perfume exhaled from the world ; fresh toilettes, ornamented drawing-rooms, the abundance and the pursuit of all those refined and delicate comforts give to the mind a sort of sweetness which is breathed forth in obliging

<sup>1</sup> *English Poets.* Waller, viii. 32.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 45.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 45.

compliments and smiles. Waller has many of these compliments and smiles, and those most flattering, apropos of a bud, a girdle, a rose. Such bouquets become his hands and his art. He pays an excellent compliment “To young Lady Lucy Sidney” on her age. And what could be more attractive for a frequenter of drawing-rooms, than this bud of still unopened youth, but which blushes already, and is on the point of expanding?

“ Yet, fairest blossom ! do not slight  
That age which you may know so soon.  
The rosy morn resigns her light  
And milder glory to the noon.”<sup>1</sup>

All his verses flow with a continuous harmony, clearness, facility, though his voice is never raised, or out of tune, or rough, nor loses its true accent, except by the worldling’s affectation, which regularly changes all tones in order to soften them. His poetry resembles one of those pretty, affected, bedizened women, busy in inclining their head on one side, and murmuring with a soft voice commonplace things which they can hardly be said to think, yet agreeable in their be-ribboned dress, and who would please altogether if they did not dream of always pleasing.

It is not that these men cannot handle grave subjects; but they handle them in their own fashion, without gravity or depth. What the courtier most lacks is the genuine sentiment of a true and original idea. That which interests him most is the correctness of the adornment, and the perfection of external form. They care little for the matter itself, much for the outward shape. In fact, it is form which they take for

<sup>1</sup> *English Poets*, Waller, viii. 45.

their subject in nearly all their serious poetry ; they are critics, they lay down precepts, they compose Arts of Poetry. Denham in his "*Preface to the Destruction of Troy*" lays down rules for translating, whilst Roscommon teaches in a complete poem, an *Essay on translated Verse*, the art of translating poetry well. The Duke of Buckinghamshire versified an *Essay on Poetry* and an *Essay on Satire*. Dryden is in the first rank of these pedagogues. Like Dryden again, they turn translators, amplifiers. Roscommon translated the *Ars Poetica* of Horace ; Waller the first act of *Pompée*, a tragedy by Corneille; Denham some fragments of Homer and Virgil, and two poems, one of *Prudence* and another of *Justice*. Rochester composed a satire against *Mankind*, in the style of Boileau, and also an epistle upon *Nothing* ; the amorous Waller wrote a didactic poem on *The Fear of God*, and another in six cantos on *Divine Love*. These are exercises of style. They take a theological thesis, a commonplace subject of philosophy, a poetic maxim, and develop it in jointed prose, furnished with rhymes ; invent nothing, feel little, and only aim at expressing good arguments in classical metaphors, in noble terms, after a conventional model. Most of their verses consist of two nouns, furnished with epithets, and connected by a verb, like college Latin verses. The epithet is good : they had to hunt through the *Gradus* for it, or, as Boileau wills it, they had to carry the line unfinished in their heads, and had to think about it an hour in the open air, until at last, at the corner of a wood, they found the right word which they could not hit upon before. I yawn, but applaud. After so much trouble a generation ends by forming the sustained style which is necessary to support, make public, and demonstrate

grand things. Meanwhile, with their ornate, official diction, and their borrowed thought they are like formal chamberlains, in embroidered coats present at a royal marriage or an imperial baptism, empty of head, grave in manner, admirable for dignity and bearing, with the punctilio and the ideas of a dummy.

## V.

One of them only (Dryden always excepted) showed talent, Sir John Denham, Charles the First's secretary. He was employed in public affairs, and after a dissolute youth, turned to serious habits; and leaving behind him satiric verse and party broad-jokes, attained in riper years a lofty oratorical style. His best poem, *Cooper's Hill*, is the description of a hill and its surroundings, blended with the historical ideas which the sight recalls, and the moral reflections which its appearance naturally suggests. All these subjects are in accordance with the nobility and the limitation of the classical spirit, and display his vigour without betraying his weaknesses; the poet could show off his whole talent without forcing it. His fine language exhibits all its beauty, because it is sincere. We find pleasure in following the regular progress of those copious phrases in which his ideas, opposed or combined, attain for the first time their definite place and full clearness, where symmetry only brings out the argument more clearly, expansion only completes thought, antithesis and repetition do not induce trifling and affectation, where the music of verse, adding the breadth of sound to the fulness of sense, conducts the chain of ideas, without effort or disorder, by an appropriate measure to a becoming order and movement. Gratifi-

cation is united with solidity ; the author of "Cooper's Hill," knows how to please as well as to impress. His poem is like a king's park, dignified and level without doubt, but arranged to please the eye, and full of choice prospects. It leads us by easy digressions across a multitude of varied thoughts. It shows us here a mountain, yonder a memorial of the nymphs, a classic memorial, like a portico filled with statues, further on a broad stream, and by its side the ruins of an abbey ; each page of the poem is like a distinct alley, with its distinct perspective. Further on, our thoughts are turned to the superstitions of the ignorant middle-ages, and to the excesses of the recent revolution ; then comes the picture of a royal hunt ; we see the trembling stag make his retreat to some dark covert :

" He calls to mind his strength, and then his speed,  
His winged heels, and then his armed head ;  
With these t' avoid, with that his fate to meet ;  
But fear prevails, and bids him trust his feet.  
So fast he flies, that his reviewing eye  
Has lost the chasers, and his ear the cry."<sup>1</sup>

These are the worthy spectacles and the studied diversity of the grounds of a nobleman. Every object, moreover, receives here, as in a king's palace, all the adornment which can be given to it ; elegant epithets are introduced to embellish a feeble substantive ; the decorations of art transform the commonplace of nature : vessels are "floating towers ;" the Thames is "the most loved of all the Ocean's sons ;" the airy mountain hides its proud head among the clouds, whilst a shady mantle clothes its sides. Among different kinds of ideas, there

<sup>1</sup> *English Poets*, vii. 237.

is one kingly, full of stately and magnificent ceremonies of self-contained and studied gestures, of correct yet commanding figures, uniform and imposing like the appointments of a palace; hence the classic writers, and Denham amongst them, draw all their poetic tints. From this every object and event takes its colouring, because constrained to come into contact with it. Here the object and events are compelled to traverse other things. Denham is not a mere courtier, he is an Englishman; that is, preoccupied by moral emotions. He often quits his landscape to enter into some grave reflection; politics, religion, disturb the enjoyment of his eyes; in reference to a hill or a forest, he meditates upon man; externals lead him inward; impressions of the senses to contemplations of the soul. The men of this race are by nature and custom esoteric. When he sees the Thames throw itself into the sea, he compares it with "mortal life hastening to meet eternity." The "lofty forehead" of a mountain, beaten by storms, reminds him of "the common fate of all that's high or great." The course of the river suggests to him ideas of inner reformation:

"O could I flow like thee! and make thy stream  
My great example, as it is my theme!  
Though deep, yet clear, though gentle yet not dull;  
Strong without rage, without o'erflowing, full.

But his proud head the airy mountain hides  
Among the clouds; his shoulders and his sides  
A shady mantle clothes; his curled brows  
Frown on the gentle stream, which calmly flows;  
While winds and storms his lofty forehead beat,  
The common fate of all that's high or great."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *English Poets*, vii. 286-7.

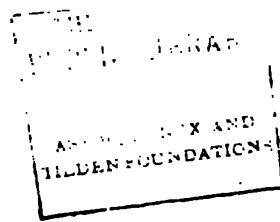
There is in the English mind an indestructible store of moral instincts, and grand melancholy ; and it is the greatest confirmation of this, that we can discover such a stock at the court of Charles II.

These are, however, but rare openings, and as it were croppings up of the original rock. The habits of the worldling are as a thick layer which cover it throughout. Manners, conversation, style, the stage, taste, all is French, or tries to be ; they imitate France as well as they are able, and go there to mould themselves. Many cavaliers went there, driven away by Cromwell. Denham, Waller, Roscommon, and Rochester resided there ; the Duchess of Newcastle, a poetess of the time, was married at Paris ; the Duke of Buckinghamshire served for a short time under Turenne ; Wycherley was sent to France by his father, who wished to rescue him from the contagion of Puritan opinions ; Vanbrugh, one of the best comic playwrights, went thither to contract a polish. The two courts were allied almost always in fact, and always at heart, by a community of interests, and of religious and monarchical ideas. Charles II. accepted from Louis XIV. a pension, a mistress, counsels, and examples ; the nobility followed their prince, and France was the model of the English court. Her literature and manners, the finest of the classic age, led the fashion. We perceive in English writings that French authors are their masters, and that they were in the hands of all well-educated people. They consulted Bossuet, translated Corneille, imitated Molière, respected Boileau. It went so far, that the greatest gallants of them tried to be altogether French, to mix some scrapes of French in every phrase. "It is as ill-breeding now to speak good English," says Wycherley,



*SIR JOHN DENHAM*





"as to write good English, good sense, or a good hand." These Frenchified coxcombs<sup>1</sup> are compliment-mongers, always powdered, perfumed, "eminent for being *bien gantés*." They affect delicacy, they are fastidious; they find Englishmen coarse, gloomy, stiff; they try to be giddy and thoughtless; they giggle and prate at random, placing the reputation of man in the perfection of his wig and his bows. The theatre, which ridicules these imitators, is an imitator after their fashion. French comedy, like French politeness, becomes their model. They copy both, altering without equalling them; for monarchical and classic France is amongst all nations, the best fitted from its instincts and institutions for the modes of worldly life, and the works of an oratorical mind. England follows it in this course, being carried away by the universal current of the age, but at a distance, and drawn aside by its national peculiarities. It is this common direction and this particular deviation which the society and its poetry have proclaimed, and which the stage and its characters will display.

## VI.

Four principal writers established this comedy—Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, Farquhar: <sup>2</sup> the first gross, and in the pristine irruption of vice; the others more sedate, possessing more a taste for urbanity than debauchery; yet all men of the world, and priding themselves on their good breeding, on passing their days at court or in fine company, on having the tastes and bearing of gentlemen. "I am not a literary man," said Congreve

<sup>1</sup> Etherege's *Sir Fopling Flutter*; Wycherley's *The Gentleman Dancing-master*, i. 2.

<sup>2</sup> From 1672 to 1726.

to Voltaire, "I am a gentleman." In fact, as Pope said, he lived more like a man of quality than a man of letters, was noted for his successes with the fair, and passed his latter years in the house of the Duchess of Marlborough. I have said that Wycherley, under Charles II., was one of the most fashionable courtiers. He served in the army for some time, as did also Vanbrugh and Farquhar; nothing is more gallant than the name of Captain which they employed, the military stories they brought back, and the feather they stuck in their hats. They all wrote comedies on the same worldly and classical model, made up of probable incidents such as we observe around us every day, of well-bred characters such as we commonly meet in a drawing-room, correct and elegant conversations such as well-bred men can carry on. This theatre, wanting in poetry, fancy, and adventures, imitative and discursive, was formed at the same time as that of Molière, by the same causes, and on his model, so that in order to comprehend it we must compare it with that of Molière.

"Molière belongs to no nation," said a great English actor (Kemble); "one day the god of comedy, wishing to write, became a man, and happened to fall into France." I accept this saying; but in becoming man he found himself, at the same time, a man of the seventeenth century and a Frenchman, and that is how he was the god of comedy. "To amuse respectable people," said Molière, "what a strange task!" Only the French art of the seventeenth century could succeed in that; for it consists in leading by an agreeable path to general notions; and the taste for these notions, as well as the custom of treading this path, is the peculiar mark of respectable people. Molière, like

Racine, expands and creates. Open any one of his plays that comes to hand, and the first scene in it, chosen at random ; after three replies you are carried away, or rather led away. The second continues the first, the third carries out the second, the fourth completes all ; a current is created which bears us on, which bears us away, which does not release us until it is exhausted. There is no check, no digression, no episodes to distract our attention. To prevent the lapses of an absent mind, a secondary character intervenes, a lackey, a lady's-maid, a wife, who, couplet by couplet, repeat in a different fashion the reply of the principal character, and by means of symmetry and contrast keep us in the path laid down. Arrived at the end, a second current seizes us and acts like the first. It is composed like the other, and with reference to the other. It throws it out by contrast, or strengthens it by resemblance. Here the valets repeat the dispute, then the reconciliation of their masters. In one place, Alceste, drawn in one direction through three pages by anger, is drawn in a contrary direction, and through three pages, by love. Further on, tradesmen, professors, relatives, domestics, relieve each other scene after scene, in order to bring out in clearer light the pretentiousness and gullibility of M. Jourdain. Every scene, every act, brings out in greater relief, completes, or prepares another. Everything is united, and everything is simple ; the action progresses, and progresses only to carry on the idea ; there is no complication, no incidents. One comic event suffices for the story. A dozen conversations make up the play of the *Misanthrope*. The same situation, five or six times renewed, is the whole of *l'Ecole des Femmes*. These pieces are made out of nothing.

They have no need of incidents, they find ample space in the compass of one room and one day, without surprises, without decoration, with an arras and four arm-chairs. This paucity of matter throws out the ideas more clearly and quickly; in fact, their whole aim is to bring those ideas prominently forward; the simplicity of the subject, the progress of the action, the linking together of the scenes,—to this everything tends. At every step clearness increases, the impression is deepened, vice stands out: ridicule is piled up, until, before so many apt and united appeals, laughter forces its way and breaks forth. And this laughter is not a mere outburst of physical amusement; it is the judgment which incites it. The writer is a philosopher, who brings us into contact with a universal truth by a particular example. We understand through him, as through La Bruyère or Nicole, the force of prejudice, the obstinacy of conventionality, the blindness of love. The couplets of his dialogue, like the arguments of their treatises, are but the worked out proof and the logical justification of a preconceived conclusion. We philosophise with him on humanity; we think because he has thought. And he has only thought thus in the character of a Frenchman, for an audience of French men of the world. In him we taste a national pleasure. French refined and systematic intelligence, the most exact in seizing on the subordination of ideas, the most ready in separating ideas from matter, the most fond of clear and tangible ideas, finds in him its nourishment and its echo. None who has sought to show us mankind, has led us by a straighter and easier mode to a more distinct and speaking portrait. I will add, to a more pleasing portrait,—and this is the

main talent of comedy: it consists in keeping back what is hateful; and observe that which is hateful abounds in the world. As soon as you will paint the world truly, philosophically, you meet with vice, injustice, and everywhere indignation; amusement flees before anger and morality. Consider the basis of *Tartuffe*; an obscene pedant, a red-faced hypocritical wretch, who, palming himself off on a decent and refined family, tries to drive the son away, marry the daughter, corrupt the wife, ruin and imprison the father, and almost succeeds in it, not by clever plots, but by vulgar mummery, and by the coarse audacity of his caddish disposition. What could be more repelling? And how is amusement to be drawn from such a subject, where Beaumarchais and La Bruyère failed?<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in the *Misanthrope*, is not the spectacle of a loyally sincere and honest man, very much in love, whom his virtue finally overwhelms with ridicule and drives from society, a sad sight to see? Rousseau was annoyed that it should produce laughter; and if we were to look upon the subject, not in Molière, but in itself, we should find enough to revolt our natural generosity. Recall his other plots; Georges Dandin mystified, Géronte beaten, Arnolphe duped, Harpagon plundered, Sganarelle married, girls seduced, louts thrashed, simpletons turned financiers. There are sorrows here, and deep ones; many would rather weep than laugh at them. Arnolphe, Dandin, Harpagon, are almost tragic characters; and when we see them in the world instead of the theatre, we are not disposed to sarcasm, but to pity. Picture to yourself the

<sup>1</sup> *Onuphre*, in La Bruyère's *Caractères*, ch. xiii. de la *Mode*; *Bepars*, in Beaumarchais *la Mère Coupable*.

originals from whom Molière has taken his doctors. Consider this venturesome experimentalist, who, in the interest of science, tries a new saw, or inoculates a virus; think of his long nights at the hospital, the wan patient carried on a mattress to the operating table, and stretching out his leg to the knife; or again imagine the peasant's bed of straw in the damp cottage, where an old dropsical mother lies choking,<sup>1</sup> while her children grudgingly count up the crowns she has already cost them. You quit such scenes deeply moved, filled with sympathy for human misery; you discover that life, seen near and face to face, is a mass of trivial harshnesses and of grievous passions; you are tempted, if you wish to depict it, to enter into the mire of sorrows whereon Balzac and Shakspeare have built: you see in it no other poetry than that audacious reasoning power which from such a confusion abstracts the master-forces, or the light of genius which flickers over the swarm and the falls of so many polluted and wounded wretches. How everything changes under the hand of a mercurial Frenchman! how all this human ugliness is blotted out! how amusing is the spectacle which Molière has arranged for us! how we ought to thank the great artist for having transformed his subject so well! At last we have a cheerful world, on canvas at least; we could not have it otherwise, but this we have. How pleasant it is to forget truth! what an art is that which divests us of ourselves! what a point of view which converts the contortions of suffering into funny grimaces! Gaiety has come upon us, the dearest possession of a Frenchman. The soldiers of Villars used to dance that they might forget

<sup>1</sup> Consultations of Sganarelle in the  *Médecin malgré lui.*

they had no longer any bread. Of all French possessions, too, it is the best. This gift does not destroy thought, but it masks it. In Molière, truth is at the bottom, but concealed ; he has heard the sobs of human tragedy, but he prefers not to re-echo them. It is quite enough to feel our wounds smart ; let us not go to the theatre to see them again. Philosophy, while it reveals them, advises us not to think of them too much. Let us enliven our condition with the gaiety of easy conversation and light wit, as we would the chamber of sickness. Let us cover Tartuffe, Harpagon, the doctors, with outrageous ridicule : ridicule will make us forget their vices ; they will afford us amusement instead of causing horror. Let Alceste be grumpy and awkward. It is in the first place true, because our more valiant virtues are only the outbreaks of a temper out of harmony with circumstances ; but, in addition, it will be amusing. His mishaps will cease to make him the martyr of justice ; they will only be the consequences of a cross-grained character. As to the mystifications of husbands, tutors, and fathers, I fancy that we are not to see in them a concerted attack on society or morality. We are only entertaining ourselves for one evening, nothing more. The syringes and thrashings, the masquerades and dances, prove that it is a sheer piece of buffoonery. Do not be afraid that philosophy will perish in a pantomime ; it is present even in the *Mariage forcé*, even in the *Malade imaginaire*. It is the mark of a Frenchman and a man of the world to clothe everything, even that which is serious, in laughter. When he is thinking, he does not always wish to show it. In his most violent moments he is still the master of the house, the polite host ; he conceals from you his thoughts or

his suffering. Mirabeau, when in agony, said to one of his friends with a smile, "Come, you who take an interest in plucky deaths, you shall see mine!" The French talk in this style when they are depicting life; no other nation knows how to philosophise smartly, and die with good taste.

This is the reason why in no other nation comedy, while it continues comic, affords a moral; Molière is the only man who gives us models without getting pedantic, without trenching on the tragic, without growing solemn. This model is the "respectable man," as the phrase was, Philinte, Ariste, Clitandre, Éraste;<sup>1</sup> there is no other who can at the same time instruct and amuse us. His talent has reflection for its basis, but it is cultivated by the world. His character has honesty for its basis, but it is in harmony with the world. You may imitate him without transgressing either reason or duty; he is neither a coxcomb nor a roisterer. You can imitate him without neglecting your interests or making yourself ridiculous; he is neither an ignoramus nor unmannerly. He has read and understands the jargon of Trissotin and Lycidas, but in order to pierce them through and through, to beat them with their own arguments, to set the gallery in a roar at their expense. He will discuss even morality and religion, but in a style so natural, with proofs so clear, with warmth so genuine, that he interests women, and is listened to by men of the world. He knows man, and reasons about him, but in such brief sentences, such living delineations, such pungent humour, that his philosophy is the best of entertainments. He is faithful to his ruined mistress, his

<sup>1</sup> Amongst women, Éliante, Henriette, Élise, Uranie, Elmire.

calumniated friend, but gracefully, without fuss. All his actions, even noble ones, have an easy way about them which adorns them; he does nothing without pleasantness. His great talent is knowledge of the world; he shows it not only in the trivial circumstances of every-day life, but in the most passionate scenes, the most embarrassing positions. A noble swordsman wants to take Philinte, the "respectable man," as his second in a duel; he reflects a moment, excuses himself in a score of phrases, and "without playing the Hector," leaves the bystanders convinced that he is no coward. Armande insults him, then throws herself in his arms; he politely averts the storm, declines the reconciliation with the most loyal frankness, and without employing a single falsehood, leaves the spectators convinced that he is no boor. When he loves Eliante,<sup>1</sup> who prefers Alceste, and whom Alceste may possibly marry, he proposes to her with a complete delicacy and dignity, without lowering himself, without recrimination, without wronging himself or his friend. When Oronte reads him a sonnet, he does not assume in the fop a nature which he has not, but praises the conventional verses in conventional language, and is not so clumsy as to display a poetical judgment which would be out of place. He takes at once his tone from the circumstances; he perceives instantly what he must say and what be silent about, in what degree and in what gradations, what exact expedient will reconcile truth and conventional propriety, how far he ought to go or where to take his stand, what faint line separates decorum from flattery, truth from awkwardness. On

<sup>1</sup> Compare the admirable tact and coolness of Eliante, Henriette, and Elmire.

this narrow path he proceeds free from embarrassment or mistakes, never put out of his way by the shocks or changes of circumstance, never allowing the calm smile of politeness to quit his lips, never omitting to receive with a laugh of good humour the nonsense of his neighbour. This cleverness, entirely French, reconciles in him fundamental honesty and worldly breeding; without it, he would be altogether on the one side or the other. In this way comedy finds its hero half-way between the *roué* and the preacher.

Such a theatre depicts a race and an age. This mixture of solidity and elegance belongs to the seventeenth century, and belongs to France. The world does not deprave, it develops Frenchmen; it polished them not only their manners and their homes, but also their sentiments and ideas. Conversation provoked thought; it was no mere talk, but an inquiry; with the exchange of news, it called forth the interchange of reflections. Theology and philosophy entered into it; morals, and the observation of the heart, formed its daily pabulum. Science kept up its vitality, and lost only its aridity. Pleasantness cloaked reason, but did not smother it. Frenchmen never think better than in society; the play of features excites them; their ready ideas flash into lightning, in their shock with the ideas of others. The varied current of conversation suits their fits and starts; the frequent change of subject fosters their invention; the pungency of piquant speeches reduces truth to small but precious coin, suitable to the lightness of their hands. And the heart is no more tainted by it than the intelligence. The Frenchman is of a sober temperament, with little taste for the brutishness of the drunkard, for violent joviality, for the

riot of loose suppers ; he is moreover gentle, obliging, always ready to please ; in order to set him at ease he needs that flow of goodwill and elegance which polite society creates and cherishes. And in accordance therewith, he shapes his temperate and amiable inclinations into maxims ; it is a point of honour with him to be serviceable and refined. Such is the gentleman, the product of society in a sociable race. It was not so with the English. Their ideas do not spring up in chance conversation, but by the concentration of solitary thought ; this is the reason why ideas were then wanting. Their gentlemanly feelings are not the fruit of sociable instincts, but of personal reflection ; that is why gentlemanly feelings were then at a discount. The brutish foundation remained ; the outside alone was smooth. Manners were gentle, sentiments harsh ; speech was studied, ideas frivolous. Thought and refinement of soul were rare, talent and fluent wit abundant. There was politeness of manner, not of heart ; they had only the set rules and the conventionalities of life, its giddiness and heedlessness.

## VII.

The English comedy-writers paint these vices, and possess them. Their talent and their stage are tainted by them. Art and philosophy are absent. The authors do not advance upon a general idea, and they do not proceed by the most direct method. They put together ill, and are embarrassed by materials. Their pieces have generally two intermingled plots, manifestly distinct,<sup>1</sup> combined in order to multiply incidents, and

<sup>1</sup> Dryden boasts of this. With him, we always find a complete comedy grossly amalgamated with a complete tragedy.

because the public demands a multitude of characters and facts. A strong current of boisterous action is necessary to stir up their dense appreciation ; they do as the Romans did, who packed several Greek plays into one. They grew tired of the French simplicity of action, because they had not the French refined taste. The two series of actions mingle and jostle one with another. We cannot see where we are going ; every moment we are turned out of our path. The scenes are ill connected ; they change twenty times from place to place. When one scene begins to develop itself, a deluge of incidents interrupts. An irrelevant dialogue drags on between the incidents, suggesting a book with the notes introduced promiscuously into the text. There is no plan carefully conceived and rigorously carried out ; they took, as it were, a plan, and wrote out the scenes one after another, pretty much as they came into their head. Probability is not well cared for. There are poorly arranged disguises, ill simulated folly, mock marriages, and attacks by robbers worthy of the comic opera. In order to obtain a sequence of ideas and probability, we must set out from some general idea. The conception of avarice, hypocrisy, the education of women, ill-assorted marriages, arranges and binds together by its individual power incidents which are to reveal it. But in the English comedy we look in vain for such a conception. Congreve, Farquhar, Vanbrugh, are only men of wit, not thinkers. They skim the surface of things, but do not penetrate. They play with their characters. They aim at success, at amusement. They sketch caricatures, they spin out in lively fashion a vain and bantering conversation ; they make answers clash with one another, fling forth para-

doxes ; their nimble fingers manipulate and juggle with the incidents in a hundred ingenious and unlooked-for ways. They have animation, they abound in gesture and repartee ; the constant bustle of the stage and its lively spirit surround them with continual excitement. But the pleasure is only skin-deep ; we have seen nothing of the eternal foundation and the real nature of mankind ; we carry no thought away ; we have passed an hour, and that is all ; the amusement teaches us nothing, and serves only to fill up the evenings of coquettes and coxcombs.

Moreover, this pleasure is not real ; it has no resemblance to the hearty laughter of Molière. In English comedy there is always an undercurrent of tartness. We have seen this, and more, in Wycherley ; the others, though less cruel, joke sourly. Their characters in a joke say harsh things to one another ; they amuse themselves by hurting each other ; a Frenchman is pained to hear this interchange of mock politeness ; he does not go to blows by way of fun. Their dialogue turns naturally to virulent satire ; instead of covering vice, it makes it prominent ; instead of making it ridiculous, it makes it odious :

“ *Clarissa*, Prithee, tell me how you have passed the night ? . .

*Araminta*. Why, I have been studying all the ways my brain could produce to plague my husband.

*Cl.* No wonder indeed you look so fresh this morning, after the satisfaction of such pleasing ideas all night.”<sup>1</sup>

These women are really wicked, and that too openly. Throughout vice is crude, pushed to extremes, served up with material adjuncts. Lady Fidget says : “ Our virtue

<sup>1</sup> Vanbrugh, *Confederacy*, ii. 1.

is like the statesman's religion, the quaker's word, gamester's oath, and the great man's honour; but cheat those that trust us."<sup>1</sup> Or again: "If you'll consult the widows of this town," says a young lady who does not wish to marry again, "they'll tell you, you should never take a lease of a house you can hire for a quarter's warning."<sup>2</sup> Or again: "My heart cut a caper up to my mouth," says a young heir, "when I heard my father was shot through the head."<sup>3</sup> The gentler collar each other on the stage, treat the ladies roughly before spectators, contrive an adultery not far off between the wings. Base or ferocious parts abound. There are furies like Mrs. Lovel and Lady Touchwood. There are swine like parson Bull and the go-between Coupler. Lady Touchwood wants to stab her lover on the stage. Coupler, on the stage, uses gestures which recall the court of Henry III. of France. Wretches like Fair and Maskwell are unmitigated scoundrels, and their hatefulness is not even cloaked by the grotesque. Even honest women like Silvia and Mrs. Sullen are plunged into the most shocking situations. Nothing shocked the English public of those days; they had no real education, but only its varnish.

There is a forced connection between the mind of the writer, the world which surrounds him, and the characters which he produces; for it is from this world that he draws the materials out of which he composes them. The sentiments which he contemplates in

<sup>1</sup> Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, v. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Vanbrugh, *Relapse*, ii. end.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> She says to Maskwell, her lover: "You want but leisure to invent fresh falsehood, and soothe me to a fond belief of all fictions; but I will stab the lie that's forming in your heart, and a sin, in pity to your soul."—Congreve, *Double Dealer*, v. 17.





*WILLIAM CONGREVE*



1920-1921

and feels himself are gradually arranged into characters ; he can only invent after his given model and his acquired experience ; and his characters only manifest what he is, or abridge what he has seen. Two features are prominent in this world ; they are prominent also on this stage. All the successful characters can be reduced to two classes—natural beings on the one part, and artificial on the other ; the first with the coarseness and shamelessness of their primitive inclinations, the second with the frivolities and vices of worldly habits : the first uncultivated, their simplicity revealing nothing but their innate baseness ; the second cultivated, their refinement instilling into them nothing but a new corruption. And the talent of the writers is suited to the painting of these two groups : they possess the grand English faculty, which is the knowledge of exact detail and real sentiments ; they see gestures, surroundings, dresses ; they hear the sounds of voices, and they have the courage to exhibit them ; they have inherited, very little, and at a great distance, and in spite of themselves, still they have inherited from Shakspeare ; they manipulate freely, and without any softening, the coarse harsh red colour which alone can bring out the figures of their brutes. On the other hand, they have animation and a good style ; they can express the thoughtless chatter, the frolicsome affectations, the inexhaustible and capricious abundance of drawing-room stupidities ; they have as much liveliness as the maddest, and at the same time they speak as well as the best instructed ; they can give the model of witty conversation ; they have lightness of touch, brilliancy, and also facility, exactness, without which you cannot draw the portrait of a man

of the world. They find naturally on their palette the strong colours which suit their barbarians, and the pretty tints which suit their exquisites.

## VIII.

First there is the blockhead, Squire Sullen, a low kind of sot, of whom his wife speaks in this fashion: "After his man and he had rolled about the room, like sick passengers in a storm, he comes flounce into bed, dead as a salmon into a fishmonger's basket; his feet cold as ice, his breath hot as a furnace, and his hands and his face as greasy as his flannel nightcap. O matrimony! He tosses up the clothes with a barbarous swing over his shoulders, disorders the whole economy of my bed, leaves me half naked, and my whole night's comfort is the tuneable serenade of that wakeful nightingale, his nose!"<sup>1</sup> Sir John Brute says: "What the plague did I marry her (his wife) for? I knew she did not like me; if she had, she would have lain with me."<sup>2</sup> He turns his drawing-room into a stable, smokes it foul to drive the women away, throws his pipe at their heads, drinks, swears, and curses. Coarse words and oaths flow through his conversation like filth through a gutter. He gets drunk at the tavern, and howls out, "Damn morality! and damn the watch! and let the constable be married."<sup>3</sup> He cries out that he is a free-born Englishman; he wants to go out and break everything. He leaves the inn with other besotted scamps, and attacks the women in the street. He robs a tailor who was carrying a doctor's gown, puts it on, thrashes the guard. He is seized and taken by the constable; on

<sup>1</sup> Farquhar, *The Beaux Stratagem*, ii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Vanbrugh, *Provoked Wife*, v. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 2.

the road he breaks out into abuse, and ends by proposing to him, amid the hiccups and stupid reiterations of a drunken man, to go and find out somewhere a bottle and a girl. He returns home at last, covered with blood and mud, growling like a dog, with red swollen eyes, calling his wife a slut and a liar. He goes to her, forcibly embraces her, and as she turns away, cries, “I see it goes damnable against your stomach—and therefore—kiss me again. (*Kisses and tumbles her.*) So, now you being as dirty and as nasty as myself, we may go pig together.”<sup>1</sup> He wants to get a cup of cold tea out of the closet, kicks open the door, and discovers his wife’s and niece’s gallants. He storms, raves madly with his clammy tongue, then suddenly falls asleep. His valet comes and takes the insensible burden on his shoulders.<sup>2</sup> It is the portrait of a mere animal, and I fancy it is not a nice one.

That is the husband; let us look at the father, Sir Tunbelly Clumsey, a country gentleman, elegant, if any of them were. Tom Fashion knocks at the door of the mansion, which looks like “Noah’s ark,” and where they receive people as in a besieged city. A servant appears at a window with a blunderbuss in his hand, who is at last with great difficulty persuaded that he ought to let his master know that somebody wishes to see him. “Ralph, go thy weas, and ask Sir Tunbelly if he pleases to be waited upon. And dost hear? call to nurse that she may lock up Miss Hoyden before the geat’s open.”<sup>3</sup> Please to observe that in this house they keep a

<sup>1</sup> Vanbrugh, *Provoked Wife*, v. 2.

<sup>2</sup> The valet Rason says to his master: “Come to your kennel, you cuckoldy drunken sot you.”—*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Vanbrugh’s *Relapse*, iii. 3.

watch over the girls. Sir Tunbelly comes up with his people, armed with guns, pitchforks, scythes, and clubs, in no amiable mood, and wants to know the name of his visitor. "Till I know your name, I shall not ask you to come into my house; and when I know your name—'tis six to four I don't ask you neither."<sup>1</sup> He is like a watchdog growling and looking at the calves of an intruder. But he presently learns that this intruder is his future son-in-law; he utters some exclamations, and makes his excuses. "Cod's my life! I ask your lordship's pardon ten thousand times. (*To a servant.*) Here, run in a-doors quickly. Get a Scotch-coal fire in the great parlour; set all the Turkey-work chairs in their places; get the great brass candlesticks out, and be sure stick the sockets full of laurel. Run! . . . And do you hear, run away to nurse, bid her let Miss Hoyden loose again, and if it was not shifting-day, let her put on a clean tucker, quick!"<sup>2</sup> The pretended son-in-law wants to marry Hoyden straight off. "Not so soon neither! that's shooting my girl before you bid her stand. . . . Besides, my wench's wedding-gown is not come home yet."<sup>3</sup> The other suggests that a speedy marriage will save money. Spare money? says the father, "Udswoons, I'll give my wench a wedding dinner, though I go to grass with the king of Assyria for't. . . . Ah! poor girl, she'll be scared out of her wits on her wedding-night; for, honestly speaking, she does not know a man from a woman but by his beard and his breeches."<sup>4</sup> Foppington, the real son-in-law, arrives. Sir Tunbelly, taking him for an impostor, calls him a dog; Hoyden proposes

<sup>1</sup> Vanbrugh's *Relapses*, iii. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

to drag him in the horse-pond ; they bind him hand and foot, and thrust him into the dog-kennel ; Sir Tunbelly puts his fist under his nose, and threatens to knock his teeth down his throat. Afterwards, having discovered the impostor, he says, " My lord, will you cut his throat ? or shall I ? . . . Here, give me my dog-whip. . . . Here, here, here, let me beat out his brains, and that will decide all." He raves, and wants to fall upon Tom Fashion with his fists. Such is the country gentleman, of high birth and a farmer, boxer and drinker, brawler and beast. There steams up from all these scenes a smell of cooking, the noise of riot, the odour of a dunghill.

Like father like child. What a candid creature is Miss Hoyden ! She grumbles to herself, " It's well I have a husband a-coming, or, ecod, I'd marry the baker ; I would so ! Nobody can knock at the gate, but presently I must be locked up ; and here's the young greyhound bitch can run loose about the house all the day long, she can ; 'tis very well." <sup>2</sup> When the nurse tells her her future husband has arrived, she leaps for joy, and kisses the old woman. " O Lord ! I'll go put on my laced smock, though I'm whipped till the blood run down my heels for't." <sup>3</sup> Tom comes himself, and asks her if she will be his wife. " Sir, I never disobey my father in anything but eating of green gooseberries." But your father wants to wait . . . " a whole week." " A week !—Why I shall be an old woman by that time." <sup>4</sup> I cannot give all her answers. There is the spirit of a goat behind her kitchen-talk. She marries Tom secretly on the spot, and the chaplain

<sup>1</sup> Vanbrugh's *Relapse*, v. 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* iv. 1.

wishes them many children. "Ecod," she says, "with all my heart ! the more the merrier, I say ; ha ! nurse!"<sup>1</sup> But Lord Foppington, her real intended, turns up, and Tom makes off. Instantly her plan is formed. She bids the nurse and chaplain hold their tongues. "If you two will be sure to hold your tongues, and not say a word of what's past, I'll e'en marry this lord too." "What," says nurse, "two husbands, my dear ?" "Why, you had three, good nurse, you may hold your tongue."<sup>2</sup> She nevertheless takes a dislike to the lord, and very soon ; he is not well made, he hardly gives her any pocket-money ; she hesitates between the two. "If I leave my lord, I must leave my lady too ; and when I rattle about the streets in my coach, they'll only say, There goes mistress—mistress—mistress what ? What's this man's name I have married, nurse ?" "Squire Fashion." "Squire Fashion is it ?—Well, 'Squire, that's better than nothing.<sup>3</sup> . . . Love him ! why do you think I love him, nurse ? ecod, I would not care if he were hanged, so I were but once married to him !—No—that which pleases me, is to think what work I'll make when I get to London ; for when I am a wife and a lady both, nurse, ecod, I'll flaunt it with the best of 'em."<sup>4</sup> But she is cautious all the same. She knows that her father has his dog's whip handy, and that he

<sup>1</sup> Vanbrugh's *Relapse*, iv. 4. The character of the nurse is excellent. Tom Fashion thanks her for the training she has given Hoyden : "Alas, all I can boast of is, I gave her pure good milk, and so your honour would have said, an you had seen how the poor thing sucked it.—Eh ! God's blessing on the sweet face on't ! how it used to hang at this poor teat, and suck and squeeze, and kick and sprawl it would, till the belly on't was so full, it would drop off like a leech." This is good, even after Juliet's nurse in Shakspeare.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* iv. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* v. 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* iv. 1.

will give her a good shake. "But, d'ye hear?" she says to the nurse. "Pray take care of one thing: when the business comes to break out, be sure you get between me and my father, for you know his tricks: he'll knock me down."<sup>1</sup> Here is your true moral ascendency. For such a character, there is no other, and Sir Tunbelly does well to keep her tied up, and to let her taste a discipline of daily stripes.<sup>2</sup>

## IX.

Let us accompany this modest character to town, and place her with her equals in fine society. All these artless ladies do wonders there, both in the way of actions and maxims. Wycherley's *Country Wife* gives us the tone. When one of them happens to be partly honest,<sup>3</sup> she has the manners and the boldness of a hussar in petticoats. Others seem born with the souls of courtesans and procuresses. "If I marry my lord Aimwell," says Dorinda, "there will be title, place, and precedence, the Park, the play, and the drawing-room, splendour, equipage, noise, and flambeaux.—Hey, my lady Aimwell's servants there! Lights, lights to the stairs! My lady Aimwell's coach put forward! Stand by, make room for her ladyship!—Are not these things moving?"<sup>4</sup> She is candid, and so are others—Corinna, Miss Betty, Belinda, for example. Belinda says to her aunt, whose virtue is tottering: "The sooner you

<sup>1</sup> Vanbrugh's *Relapses*, v. 5.

<sup>2</sup> See also the character of a young stupid blockhead, Squire Humphrey. (Vanbrugh's *Journey to London*). He has only a single idea, to be always eating.

<sup>3</sup> Wycherley's *Hippolita*; Farquhar's *Silvia*.

<sup>4</sup> Farquhar's *Beaux Stratagem*, iv. 1.

capitulate the better."<sup>1</sup> Further on, when she has decided to marry Heartfree, to save her aunt who is compromised, she makes a confession of faith which promises well for the future of her new spouse; "Were't not for your affair in the balance, I should go near to pick up some odious man of quality yet, and only take poor Heartfree for a gallant."<sup>2</sup> These young ladies are clever, and in all cases apt to follow good instruction. Listen to Miss Prue: "Look you here, madam, then, what Mr. Tattle has given me.—Look you here, cousin, here's a snuff-box: nay, there's snuff in't;—here, will you have any?—Oh, good! how sweet it is!—Mr. Tattle is all over sweet; his periuke is sweet, and his gloves are sweet, and his handkerchief is sweet, pure sweet, sweeter than roses.—Smell him, mother, madam, I mean.—He gave me this ring for a kiss. . . . Smell, cousin; he says, he'll give me something that will make my smocks smell this way. Is not it pure?—It's better than lavender, mun.—I'm resolved I won't let nurse put any more lavender among my smocks—ha, cousin?"<sup>3</sup> It is the silly chatter of a young magpie, who flies for the first time. Tattle, alone with her, tells her he is going to make love:

"*Miss Prue.* Well; and how will you make love to me? come, I long to have you begin. Must I make love too? you must tell me how.

*Tattle.* You must let me speak, miss, you must not speak first; I must ask you questions, and you must answer.

*Miss P.* What, is it like the catechism?—come then, ask me.

*T.* D'ye think you can love me?

*Miss P.* Yea.

<sup>1</sup> Vanbrugh's *Provoked Wife*, iii. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* v. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Congreve's *Love for Love*, ii. 10.

*T.* Pooh ! pox ! you must not say yes already ; I shan't care a farthing for you then in a twinkling.

*Miss P.* What must I say then ?

*T.* Why, you must say no, or you believe not, or you can't tell.

*Miss P.* Why, must I tell a lie then ?

*T.* Yes, if you'd be well-bred ;—all well-bred persons lie.—Besides, you are a woman, you must never speak what you think : your words must contradict your thoughts ; but your actions may contradict your words. So, when I ask you, if you can love me, you must say no, but you must love me too. If I tell you you are handsome, you must deny it, and say I flatter you. But you must think yourself more charming than I speak you : and like me, for the beauty which I say you have, as much as if I had it myself. If I ask you to kiss me, you must be angry, but you must not refuse me. . . .

*Miss P.* O Lord, I swear this is pure !—I like it better than our old-fashioned country way of speaking one's mind ;—and must not you lie too ?

*T.* Hum !—Yes ; but you must believe I speak truth.

*Miss P.* O Gemini ! well, I always had a great mind to tell lies ; but they frightened me, and said it was a sin.

*T.* Well, my pretty creature ; will you make me happy by giving me a kiss ?

*Miss P.* No, indeed ; I'm angry at you. (*Runs and kisses him.*)

*T.* Hold, hold, that's pretty well ;—but you should not have given it me, but have suffered me to have taken it.

*Miss P.* Well, we'll do it again.

*T.* With all my heart. Now, then, my little angel. (*Kisses her.*)

*Miss P.* Pish !

*T.* That's right—again, my charmer ! (*Kisses again.*)

*Miss P.* O fy ! nay, now I can't abide you.

T. Admirable! that was as well as if you had been born and bred in Covent Garden."<sup>1</sup>

She makes such rapid progress, that we must stop the quotation forthwith. And mark, what is bred in the bone will come out in the flesh. All these charming characters soon employ the language of kitchen-maids. When Ben, the dolt of a sailor, wants to make love to Miss Prue, she sends him off with a flea in his ear, raves, lets loose a string of cries and coarse expressions, calls him a "great sea-calf." "What does father mean," he says, "to leave me alone, as soon as I come home, with such a dirty dowdy? Sea-calf! I an't calf enough to lick your chalked face, you cheese-curd, you." Moved by these amenities, she breaks out into a rage, weeps, calls him a "stinking tar-barrel."<sup>2</sup> People come and put a stop to this first essay at gallantry. She fires up, declares she will marry Tattle, or the butler, if she cannot get a better man. Her father says, "Hussy, you shall have a rod." She answers, "A fiddle of a rod! I'll have a husband: and if you won't get me one, I'll get one for myself. I'll marry our Robin the butler."<sup>3</sup> Here are pretty and prancing mares if you like; but decidedly, in these

<sup>1</sup> Congreve's *Love for Love*, ii. 11.

<sup>2</sup> "Miss Prue. Well, and there's a handsome gentleman, and a fine gentleman, and a sweet gentleman, that was here, that loves me, and I love him; and if he sees you speak to me any more, he'll thrash your jacket for you, he will; you great sea-calf.

*Ben.* What! do you mean that fair-weather spark that was here just now! Will he thrash my jacket! Let'n, let'n, let'n—but an he comes near me, mayhap I may give him a salt-eel for's supper, for all that. What does father mean, to leave me alone, as soon as I come home, with such a dirty dowdy? Sea-calf! I an't calf enough to lick your chalked face, you cheese-curd you."—*Ibid.* iii. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* v. 6.

authors' hands, the natural man becomes nothing but a waif from the stable or the kennel.

Will you be better pleased by the educated man? The worldly life which they depict is a regular carnival, and the heads of their heroines are full of wild imaginations and unchecked gossip. You may see in Congreve how they chatter, with what a flow of words and affectations, with what a shrill and modulated voice, with what gestures, what twisting of arms and neck, what looks raised to heaven, what genteel airs, what grimaces. *Lady Wishfort* speaks:

"But art thou sure Sir Rowland will not fail to come? or will he not fail when he does come? Will he be importunate, Foible, and push? For if he should not be importunate, I shall never break decorums:—I shall die with confusion, if I am forced to advance.—Oh no, I can never advance!—I shall swoon, if he should expect advances. No, I hope Sir Rowland is better bred than to put a lady to the necessity of breaking her forms. I won't be too coy neither—I won't give him despair—but a little disdain is not amiss; a little scorn is alluring.

*Foible*. A little scorn becomes your ladyship.

*Lady Wishfort*. Yes, but tenderness becomes me best—a sort of dyingness—you see that picture has a sort of a—ha, Foible! a swimmingness in the eye—yes, I'll look so—my niece affects it; but she wants features. Is Sir Rowland handsome? Let my toilet be removed—I'll dress above. I'll receive Sir Rowland here. Is he handsome? Don't answer me. I won't know: I'll be surprised, I'll be taken by surprise.<sup>1</sup> . . . And how do I look, Foible?

*F.* Most killing well madam.

*Lady W.* Well, and how shall I receive him? in what figure shall I give his heart the first impression? . . . Shall I

<sup>1</sup> Congreve, *The Way of the World*, iii. 5.

sit!—no, I won't sit—I'll walk—ay, I'll walk from the door upon his entrance; and then turn full upon him—no, that will be too sudden. I'll lie—ay, I'll lie down—I'll receive him in my little dressing-room; there's a couch—yea, yes, I'll give the first impression on a couch. I won't lie neither; but loll and lean upon one elbow: with one foot a little dangling off, jogging in a thoughtful way—yes—and then as soon as he appears, start, ay, start, and be surprised, and rise to meet him in a pretty disorder.”<sup>1</sup>

These hesitations of a finished coquette become still more vehement at the critical moment. Lady Plyant thinks herself beloved by Mellefont, who does not love her at all, and tries in vain to undeceive her.

“*Mellefont*. For heaven's sake, madam.

*Lady Plyant*. O, name it no more!—Bless me, how can you talk of heaven! and have so much wickedness in your heart? May be you don't think it a sin.—They say some of you gentlemen don't think it a sin.—May be it is no sin to them that don't think it so; indeed, if I did not think it a sin—but still my honour, if it were no sin.—But then, to marry my daughter, for the conveniency of frequent opportunities, I'll never consent to that; as sure as can be I'll break the match.

*Mel.* Death and amazement.—Madam, upon my knees.

*Lady P.* Nay, nay, rise up; come, you shall see my good nature. I know love is powerful, and nobody can help his passion: 'tis not your fault; nor I swear it is not mine. How can I help it, if I have charms? and how can you help it if you are made a captive? I swear it is pity it should be a fault. But my honour,—well, but your honour too—but the sin!—well, but the necessity—O Lord, here is somebody coming, I dare not stay. Well, you must consider of your crime; and strive as much as can be against it,—strive, be sure—but

<sup>1</sup> Congreve, *The Way of the World*, iv.

don't be melancholic, don't despair.—But never think that I'll grant you anything ; O Lord, no.—But be sure you lay aside all thoughts of the marriage : for though I know you don't love Cynthia, only as a blind to your passion for me, yet it will make me jealous.—O Lord, what did I say ? jealous ! no, no ; I can't be jealous, for I must not love you—therefore don't hope,—but don't despair neither.—O, they're coming ! I must fly.”<sup>1</sup>

She escapes and we will not follow her.

This giddiness, this volubility, this pretty corruption, these reckless and affected airs, are collected in the most brilliant, the most worldly portrait of the stage we are discussing, that of Mrs. Millamant, “a fine lady,” as the *Dramatis Personæ* say.<sup>2</sup> She enters, “with her fan spread and her streamers out,” dragging a train of furbelows and ribbons, passing through a crowd of laced and bedizened fops, in splendid perukes, who flutter about her path, haughty and wanton, witty and scornful, toying with gallantries, petulant, with a horror of every grave word and all nobility of action, falling in only with change and pleasure. She laughs at the sermons of Mirabell, her suitor : “Sententious Mirabell !—Prithee don't look with that violent and inflexible wise face, like Solomon at the dividing of the child in an old tapestry-hanging.<sup>3</sup> . . . Ha ! ha ! ha !—pardon me, dear creature, though I grant you 'tis a little barbarous, ha ! ha ! ha !”<sup>4</sup>

She breaks out into laughter, then gets into a rage, then banters, then sings, then makes faces, and changes at every motion while we look at her. It is a regular whirlpool ; all turns round in her brain as

<sup>1</sup> Congreve, *The Double-dealer*, ii. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Congreve, *The Way of the World*. <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* ii. 6. <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* iii. 11.

in a clock when the mainspring is broken. Nothing can be prettier than her fashion of entering on matrimony :

“ *Millamant*. Ah ! I’ll never marry unless I am first made sure of my will and pleasure ! . . . My dear liberty, shall I leave thee ? my faithful solitude, my darling contemplation, must I bid you then adieu ? Ay—h—adieu—my morning thoughts, agreeable wakings, indolent alumbers, all ye *douceurs* ye *sommeils du matin* adieu !—I can’t do it ; ‘tis more than impossible—positively, Mirabell, I’ll lie a-bed in a morning as long as I please.

*Mirabell*. Then I’ll get up in a morning as early as I please.

*Mill*. Ah ! idle creature, get up when you will—and d’ye hear, I won’t be called names after I’m married ; positively I won’t be called names.

*Mir*. Names !

*Mill*. Ay, as wife, spouse, my dear, joy, jewel, love, sweet heart, and the rest of that nauseous cant, in which men and their wives are so fulsomely familiar—I shall never bear that—good Mirabell, don’t let us be familiar or fond, nor kiss before folks, like my Lady Fadler, and Sir Francis. . . . Let us never visit together, nor go to a play together ; but let us be very strange and well-bred : let us be as strange as if we had been married a great while ; and as well bred as if we were not married at all. . . .

*Mir*. Shall I kiss your hand upon the contract ?<sup>1</sup>

*Mill*. Fainall, what shall I do ? shall I have him ? I think I must have him.

*Fainall*. Ay, ay, take him. What should you do ?

*Mill*. Well then—I’ll take my death I’m in a horrid fright—Fainall, I shall never say it—well—I think—I’ll endure you.

*Fain*. Fy ! fy ! have him, have him, and tell him so in plain terms : for I am sure you have a mind to him.

<sup>1</sup> Congreve, *The Way of the World*, iv. 5.

*Mill.* Are you? I think I have—and the horrid man looks as if he thought so too—well, you ridiculous thing you, I'll have you—I won't be kissed, nor I won't be thanked—here kiss my hand though.—So, hold your tongue now, don't say a word.”<sup>1</sup>

The agreement is complete. I should like to see one more article to it—a divorce “*a mensa et thoro* :” this would be the genuine marriage of the worldlings, that is a decent divorce. And I am sure that in two years Mirabell and Millamant will come to this. Hither treads the whole of this theatre; for, with regard to the women, but particularly with regard to the married women, I have only presented their most amiable aspects. Deeper down it is all gloomy, bitter, above all, pernicious. It represents a household as a prison, marriage as a warfare, woman as a rebel, adultery as the result looked for, irregularity as a right, extravagance as pleasure.<sup>2</sup> A woman of fashion goes to bed in the

<sup>1</sup> Congreve, *The Way of the World*, iv. 6.

<sup>2</sup> “*Amanda*. How did you live together? *Berindthia*. Like man and wife, asunder.—He loved the country, I the town. He hawks and hounds, I coaches and equipage. He eating and drinking, I carding and playing. He the sound of a horn, I the squeak of a fiddle. We were dull company at table, worse a-bed. Whenever we met, we gave one another the spleen; and never agreed but once, which was about lying alone.”—Vanbrugh, *Relapse*, Act ii. *ad fin.*

Compare Vanbrugh, *A Journey to London*. Rarely has the repulsiveness and corruption of the brutish or worldly nature been more vividly displayed. Little Betty and her brother, Squire Humphry, deserve hanging.

Again. “*Mrs. Foresight*. Do you think any woman honest? *Scandal*. Yes, several very honest; they'll cheat a little at cards, sometimes; but that's nothing. *Mrs. F.* Pshaw! but virtuous, I mean. *S.* Yes, faith; I believe some women are virtuous too; but 'tis as I believe some men are valiant, through fear. For why should a man court danger or a woman shun pleasure?”—Congreve, *Love for Love*, iii. 14.

morning, rises at mid-day, curses her husband, listens to obscenities, frequents balls, haunts the plays, ruins reputations, turns her home into a gambling-house, borrows money, allures men, associates her honour and fortune with debts and assignations. "We are as wicked (as men)," says Lady Brute, "but our vices lie another way. Men have more courage than we, so they commit more bold impudent sins. They quarrel, fight, swear, drink, blaspheme, and the like ; whereas we being cowards, only backbite, tell lies, cheat at cards, and so forth."<sup>1</sup> An admirable resumé, in which the gentlemen are included and the ladies too ! The world has done nothing but provide them with correct phrases and elegant dresses. In Congreve especially they talk in the best style ; above all they know how to hand ladies about and entertain them with news ; they are expert in the fence of retorts and replies ; they are never out of countenance, find means to make the most ticklish notions understood ; they discuss very well, speak excellently, make their bow still better ; but to sum up, they are blackguards, systematical epicureans, professed seducers. They set forth immorality in maxims, and reason out their vice. "Give me," says one, "a man that keeps his five senses keen and bright as his sword, that has 'em always drawn out in their just order and strength, with his reason, as commander at the head of 'em, that detaches 'em by turns upon whatever party of pleasure agreeably offers, and commands 'em to retreat upon the least appearance of disadvantage or danger. . . . I love a fine house, but let another keep it ; and just so I

<sup>1</sup> Vanbrugh, *Provoked Wife*, v. 2. Compare also in this piece the character of Mademoiselle, the French chambermaid. They represent French vice as even more shameless than English vice.

love a fine woman.”<sup>1</sup> One deliberately seduces his friend’s wife; another under a false name gets possession of his brother’s intended. A third hires false witnesses to secure a dowry. I must ask the reader to consult for himself the fine stratagems of Worthy, Mirabell, and others. They are coldblooded rascals who forge, commit adultery, swindle, as if they had done nothing else all their lives. They are represented here as men of fashion; they are theatrical lovers, heroes, and as such they manage to get hold of an heiress. We must go to Mirabell for an example of this medley of corruption and elegance. Mrs. Fainall, his former mistress, married by him to a common friend, a miserable wretch, complains to him of this hateful marriage. He appeases her, gives her advice, shows her the precise mode, the true expedient for setting things on a comfortable footing. “You should have just so much disgust for your husband, as may be sufficient to make you relish your lover.” She cries in despair, “Why did you make me marry this man?” He smiles calmly, “Why do we daily commit disagreeable and dangerous actions? to save that idol, reputation.” How tender is this argument! How can a man better console a woman whom he has plunged into bitter unhappiness! What a touching logic in the insinuation which follows: “If the familiarities of our loves had produced that consequence of which you were apprehensive, where could you have fixed a father’s name with credit, but on a

<sup>1</sup> Farquhar’s *The Beaux Stratagem*, i. 1; and in the same piece here is the catechism of love: “What are the objects of that passion? —youth, beauty, and clean linen.” And from the *Mock Astrologer* of Dryden: “As I am a gentleman, a man about town, one that wears good cloths, eats, drinks, and wenches sufficiently.”

husband?" He continues his reasoning in an excellent style; listen to the dilemma of a man of feeling: "A better man ought not to have been sacrificed to the occasion; a worse had not answered to the purpose. When you are weary of him, you know your remedy."<sup>1</sup> Thus are a woman's feelings to be considered, especially a woman whom we have loved. To cap all, this delicate conversation is meant to force the poor deserted Mrs. Fainall into a low intrigue which shall obtain for Mirabell a pretty wife and a good dowry. Certainly this gentleman knows the world; no one could better employ a former mistress. Such are the cultivated characters of this theatre, as dishonest as the uncultivated ones: having transformed their evil instincts into systematic vices, lust into debauchery, brutality into cynicism, perversity into depravity, deliberate egotists, calculating sensualists, with rules for their immorality, reducing feeling to self-interest, honour to decorum, happiness to pleasure.

The English Restoration altogether was one of those great crises which, while warping the development of a society and a literature, show the inward spirit which they modify, but which contradicts them. Society did not lack vigour, nor literature talent; men of the world were polished, writers inventive. There was a court, drawing-rooms, conversation, worldly life, a taste for letters, the example of France, peace, leisure, the influence of the sciences, of politics, of theology,—in short, all the happy circumstances which can elevate the mind and civilise manners. There was the vigorous satire of Wycherley, the sparkling dialogue and delicate raillery of Congreve, the frank nature and animation

<sup>1</sup> Congreve, *The Way of the World*, ii. 4.

of Vanbrugh, the manifold invention of Farquhar, in short, all the resources which might nourish the comic element, and offer a genuine theatre to the best constructions of human intelligence. Nothing came to a head ; all was abortive. Their age left nothing behind but the memory of corruption ; their comedy remains a repertory of viciousness ; society had only a soiled elegance, literature a frigid wit. Their manners are gross and trivial ; their ideas are futile or incomplete. Through disgust and reaction, a revolution was at hand in literary feeling and moral habits, as well as in general beliefs and political institutions. Man was to change altogether, and to turn completely round at once. The same repugnance and the same experience were to detach him from every aspect of his old condition. The Englishman discovered that he was not monarchical, Papistical, nor sceptical, but liberal, Protestant, and a believer. He came to understand that he was not a roisterer nor a worldling, but reflective and introspective. He possesses a current of animal life too violent to suffer him without danger to abandon himself to enjoyment ; he needs a barrier of moral reasoning to repress his outbreaks. There is in him a current of attention and will too strong to suffer himself to rest content with trifles ; he needs some weighty and serviceable labour on which to expend his power. He needs a barrier and an employment. He needs a constitution and a religion which shall restrain him by duties which must be performed, and which shall occupy him by rights which must be defended. He is content only in a serious and orderly life ; there he finds the natural groove and the necessary outlet for his faculties and his passions. From this time he enters upon it, and this theatre itself

exhibits the impress of it. It undoes and transforms itself. Collier threw discredit upon it; Addison condemned it. National sentiment awoke on the stage; French manners are jeered at; the prologues celebrate the defeats of Louis XIV.; the license, elegance, religion of his court, are presented under a ridiculous or odious light.<sup>1</sup> Immorality gradually diminishes, marriage is more respected, the heroines go no further than to the verge of adultery;<sup>2</sup> the roisterers are pulled up at the critical moment; one of them suddenly declares himself purified, and speaks in verse, the better to mark his enthusiasm; another praises marriage;<sup>3</sup> some aspire in the fifth act to an orderly life. We shall soon see Steele writing a moral treatise called *The Christian Hero*. Henceforth comedy declines and literary talent flows into another channel. Essay, novel, pamphlet, dissertation, take the place of the drama; and the English classical spirit, abandoning the kinds of writing which are foreign to its nature, enters upon the great works which are destined to immortalise it and give it expression.

## X.

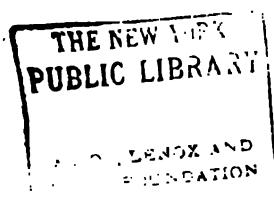
Nevertheless, in this continuous decline of dramatic invention, and in the great change of literary vitality, some shoots strike out at distant intervals towards

<sup>1</sup> The part of Chaplain Foigard in Farquhar's *Beaux Stratagem*; of Mademoiselle, and generally of all the French people.

<sup>2</sup> The part of Amanda in Vanbrugh's *Relapse*; of Mrs. Sullen; the conversion of two roisterers, in the *Beaux Stratagem*.

<sup>3</sup> "Though marriage be a lottery in which there are a wondrous many blanks, yet there is one inestimable lot, in which the only heaven upon earth is written."

"To be capable of loving one, doubtless, is better than to possess a thousand."—VANBRUGH.





*OLIVER GOLDSMITH*



comedy; for mankind always seeks for entertainment, and the theatre is always a place of entertainment. The tree once planted grows, feebly no doubt, with long intervals of almost total dryness and almost constant barrenness, yet subject to imperfect renewals of life, to transitory partial blossomings, sometimes to an inferior fruitage bursting forth from the lowest branches. Even when the great subjects are worn out, there is still room here and there for a happy idea. Let a wit, clever and experienced, take it in hand, he will catch up a few oddities on his way, he will introduce on the scene some vice or fault of his time; the public will come in crowds, and ask no better than to recognise itself and laugh. There was one of these successes when Gay, in the *Beggars' Opera*, brought out the rascaldom of the great world, and avenged the public on Walpole and the court; another, when Goldsmith, inventing a series of mistakes, led his hero and his audience through five acts of blunders.<sup>1</sup> After all, if true comedy can only exist in certain ages, ordinary comedy can exist in any age. It is too akin to the pamphlet, novels, satire, not to raise itself occasionally by its propinquity. If I have an enemy, instead of attacking him in a brochure, I can take my fling at him on the stage. If I am capable of painting a character in a story, I am not far from having the talent to bring out the pith of this same character in a few turns of a dialogue. If I can quietly ridicule a vice in a copy of verses, I shall easily arrive at making this vice speak out from the mouth of an actor. At least I shall be tempted to try it; I shall be seduced by the wonderful *éclat* which the footlights, declamation,

<sup>1</sup> *She Stoops to Conquer.*

scenery give to an idea ; I shall try and bring my own into this strong light ; I shall go in for it even when it is necessary that my talent be a little or a good deal forced for the occasion. If need be, I shall delude myself, substitute expedients for artless originality and true comic genius. If on a few points I am inferior to the great masters, on some, it may be, I surpass them ; I can work up my style, refine upon it, discover happier words, more striking jokes, a brisker exchange of brilliant repartees, newer images, more picturesque comparisons ; I can take from this one a character, from the other a situation, borrow of a neighbouring nation, out of old plays, good novels, biting pamphlets, polished satires, and petty newspapers ; I can accumulate effects, serve up to the public a stronger and more appetising stew ; above all, I can perfect my machine, oil the wheels, plan the surprises, the stage effects, the see-saw of the plot, like a consummate playwright. The art of constructing plays is as capable of development as the art of clock-making. The farce-writer of to-day sees that the catastrophe of half of Molière's plays is ridiculous ; nay, many of them can produce catastrophes better than Molière ; in the long run, they succeed in stripping the theatre of all awkwardness and circumlocution. A piquant style, and perfect machinery ; pungency in all the words, and animation in all the scenes ; a superabundance of wit, and marvels of ingenuity ; over all this, a true physical activity, and the secret pleasure of depicting and justifying oneself, of public self-glorification : here is the foundation of the *School for Scandal*, here the source of the talent and the success of Sheridan.

Richard Brinaley Sheridan was the contemporary of Beaumarchais, and resembled him in his talent and in his life. The two epochs, the two dramatic schools, the two characters, correspond. Like Beaumarchais, he was a lucky adventurer, clever, amiable, and generous, reaching success through scandal, who flashed up in a moment, dazzled everybody, scaled with a rush the empyrean of politics and literature, settled himself, as it were, among the constellations, and, like a brilliant rocket, presently went out completely exhausted. Nothing failed him; he attained all at the first attempt, without apparent effort, like a prince who need only show himself to win his place. He took as his birthright everything that was most surpassing in happiness, most brilliant in art, most exalted in worldly position. The poor unknown youth, the wretched translator of an unreadable Greek sophist, who at twenty walked about Bath in a red waistcoat and a cocked hat, destitute of hope, and ever conscious of the emptiness of his pockets, had gained the heart of the most admired beauty and musician of her time, had carried her off from ten rich, elegant, titled adorers, had fought with the best-hoaxed of the ten, beaten him, had carried by storm the curiosity and attention of the public. Then, challenging glory and wealth, he placed successively on the stage the most diverse and the most applauded dramas, comedies, farce, opera, serious verse; he bought and worked a large theatre without a farthing, inaugurated a reign of successes and pecuniary advantages, and led a life of elegance amid the enjoyments of social and domestic joys, surrounded by universal admiration and wonder. Thence, aspiring yet higher, he conquered power, entered the House of Commons,

showed himself a match for the first orators, opposed Pitt, accused Warren Hastings, supported Fox, jeered at Burke ; sustained with brilliancy, disinterestedness, and constancy, a most difficult and liberal part ; became one of the three or four most noted men in England, an equal of the greatest lords, the friend of the Prince of Wales, in the end even Receiver-General of the Duchy of Cornwall, treasurer to the fleet. In every career he took the lead. As Byron said of him : “ Whatsoever Sheridan has done or chosen to do has been, *par excellence*, always the *best* of its kind. He has written the *best* comedy (*The School for Scandal*), the *best* drama (in my mind far before that St. Giles lampoon *The Beggar’s Opera*), the *best* farce (*The Critic*—it is only too good for a farce), and the *best* Address (*Monologue on Garrick*), and, to crown all, delivered the *very best* oration (the famous Begum Speech) ever conceived or heard in this country.”<sup>1</sup>

All ordinary rules were reversed in his favour. He was forty-four years old, debts began to accumulate ; he had supped and drunk to excess ; his cheeks were purple, his nose red. In this state he met at the Duke of Devonshire’s a charming young lady with whom he fell in love. At the first sight she exclaimed, “ What an ugly man, a regular monster ! ” He spoke to her ; she confessed that he was very ugly, but that he had a good deal of wit. He spoke again, and again, and she found him very amiable. He spoke yet again, and she loved him, and resolved at all hazard to marry him. The father, a prudent man, wishing to end the affair, gave out that his future son-in-law must provide a dowry of fifteen thousand pounds ; the fifteen

<sup>1</sup> *The Works of Lord Byron*, 18 vols., ed. Moore, 1832, ii. p. 303.

thousand pounds were deposited as by magic in the hands of a banker ; the young couple set off into the country ; and Sheridan, meeting his son, a fine strapping fellow, not very satisfied with the marriage, persuaded him that it was the most sensible thing a father could do, and the most fortunate event that a son could rejoice over. Whatever the business, whoever the man, he persuaded ; none withstood him, every one fell under his charm.

What is more difficult than for an ugly man to make a young girl forget his ugliness ? There is one thing more difficult, and that is to make a creditor forget you owe him money. There is something more difficult still, and that is, to borrow money from a creditor who has come to dun you. One day one of his friends was arrested for debt ; Sheridan sends for Mr. Henderson, the crabbed tradesman, coaxes him, interests him, moves him to tears, works upon his feelings, hedges him in with general considerations and lofty eloquence, so that Mr. Henderson offers his purse, actually wants to lend two hundred pounds, insists, and finally, to his great joy, obtains permission to lend it. No one was ever more amiable, quicker to win confidence than Sheridan ; rarely has the sympathetic, affectionate, and fascinating character been more fully displayed ; he was literally seductive. In the morning, creditors and visitors filled the rooms in which he lived ; he came in smiling with an easy manner, with so much loftiness and grace, that the people forgot their wants and their claims, and looked as if they had only come to see him. His animation was irresistible ; no one had a more dazzling wit ; he had an inexhaustible fund of puns, contrivances, sallies, novel ideas. Lord Byron, who was a good judge, said that he had never heard nor conceived

of a more extraordinary power of conversation. Men spent nights in listening to him ; no one equalled him during a supper ; even when drunk he retained his wit. One morning he was picked up by the watch, and they asked him his name ; he gravely answered, "Wilberforce." With strangers and inferiors he had no arrogance or stiffness ; he possessed in an eminent degree that unreserved character which always exhibits itself complete, which holds back none of its light, which abandons and gives itself up ; he wept when he received a sincere eulogy from Lord Byron, or in recounting his miseries as a plebeian parvenu. Nothing is more charming than this openness of heart ; it at once sets people on a footing of peace and amity ; men suddenly desert their defensive and cautious attitude ; they perceive that a man is giving himself up to them, and they give themselves up to him ; the outpouring of his innermost feelings invites the outpouring of theirs. A minute later, Sheridan's impetuous and sparkling individuality flashes out ; his wit explodes, rattles like a discharge of fire-arms ; he takes the conversation to himself, with a sustained brilliancy, a variety, an inexhaustible vigour, till five o'clock in the morning. Against such a necessity for launching out in unconsidered speech, of indulgence, of self-outpouring, a man had need be well on his guard ; life cannot be passed like a holiday ; it is a strife against others and against oneself ; people must think of the future, mistrust themselves, make provision ; there is no subsisting without the precaution of a shopkeeper, the calculation of a tradesman. If we sup too often, we will end by not having wherewithal to dine upon ; when our pockets have holes in them, the shillings will fall out ; nothing is more of a truism, but

it is true. Sheridan's debts accumulated, his digestion failed. He lost his seat in Parliament, his theatre was burned; sheriff's officer succeeded sheriff's officer, and they had long been in possession of his house. At last, a bailiff arrested the dying man in his bed, and was for taking him off in his blankets; nor would he let him go until threatened with a lawsuit, the doctor having declared that the sick man would die on the road. A certain newspaper (the *Examiner*) cried shame on the great lords who suffered such a man to end so miserably; they hastened to leave their cards at his door. In the funeral procession two brothers of the king, dukes, earls, bishops, the first men in England, carried or followed the body. A singular contrast, picturing in abstract all his talent, and all his life; lords at his funeral and bailiffs at his death-bed.

His theatre was in accordance with his life; all was brilliant, but the metal was not all his own, nor was it of the best quality. His comedies were comedies of society, the most amusing ever written, but merely comedies of society. Imagine the exaggerated caricatures artists are wont to improvise, in the drawing-room of a house where they are intimate, about eleven o'clock in the evening. His first play, *The Rivals*, and afterwards his *Duenna*, and *The Critic*, are filled with these, and scarce anything else. There is Mrs. Malaprop, a silly pretentious woman, who uses grand words higgledy-piggledy, delighted with herself, in "a nice derangement of epitaphs" before her nouns, and declaring that her niece is "as headstrong as an allegory on the banks of the Nile." There is Bob Acres, who suddenly becomes a hero, gets engaged in a duel, and being led on the ground, calculates the effect of the balls, thinks of his

will, burial, embalmment, and wishes he were at home. There is another caricature in the person of a clumsy and cowardly servant, of an irascible and brawling father, of a sentimental and romantic young lady, of a touchy Irish duellist. All this jogs and jostles on, without much order, amid the surprises of a twofold plot, by aid of appliances and rencontres, without the full and regular control of a dominating idea. But in vain we perceive it is a patchwork; the high spirit carries off everything: we laugh heartily; every single scene has its facetious and rapid movement; we forget that the clumsy valet makes remarks as witty as Sheridan himself,<sup>1</sup> and that the irascible gentleman speaks as well as the most elegant of writers.<sup>2</sup> The playwright is also a man of letters; if, through mere animal and social spirit, he wished to amuse others and to amuse himself, he does not forget the interests of his talent and the care for his reputation. He has taste, he appreciates the refinements of style, the worth of a new image, of a striking contrast, of a witty and well-considered insinuation. He has, above all, wit, a wonderful conversational wit, the art of rousing and sustaining the attention, of

<sup>1</sup> *Acres.* Odds blades! David, no gentleman will ever risk the loss of his honour!

*David.* I say, then, it would be but civil in honour never to risk the loss of a gentleman.—Look ye, master, this honour seems to me to be a marvellous false friend; ay, truly, a very courtier-like servant.—*The Dramatic Works of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, 1828: The Rivals*, iv. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Sir Anthony.*—Nay, but Jack, such eyes! so innocently wild! so bashfully irresolute! Not a glance but speaks and kindles some thought of love! Then, Jack, her cheeks! so deeply blushing at the insinuations of her tell-tale eyes! Then, Jack, her lips! O Jack, lips, smiling at their own discretion! and if not smiling, more sweetly pouting, more lovely in sullenness!—*The Rivals*, iii. 1.

being biting, varied, of taking his hearers unawares, of throwing in a repartee, of setting folly in relief, of accumulating one after another witticisms and happy phrases. He brought himself to perfection subsequently to his first play, having acquired theatrical experience, writing and erasing ; trying various scenes, recasting, arranging them ; his desire was that nothing should arrest the interest, no improbability shock the spectator ; that his comedy might glide on with the precision, certainty, uniformity of a good machine. He invents jests, replaces them by better ones ; he whets his jokes, binds them up like a sheaf of arrows, and writes at the bottom of the last page, " Finished, thank God.—Amen." He is right, for the work costs him some pains ; he will not write a second. This kind of writing, artificial and condensed as the satires of La Bruyère, is like a cut phial, into which the author has distilled all his reflections, his reading, his wit, without keeping anything for himself.

What is there in this celebrated *School for Scandal* ? And how is it that it has cast upon English comedy, which day by day was being more and more forgotten, the radiance of a last success ? Sheridan took two characters from Fielding, Blifil, and Tom Jones ; two plays of Molière, *Le Misanthrope* and *Tartuffe* ; and from these puissant materials, condensed with admirable cleverness, he has constructed the most brilliant firework imaginable. Molière has only one female slanderer, Célimène ; the other characters serve only to give her a cue : there is quite enough of such a jeering woman ; she rails on within certain bounds, without hurry, like a true queen of the drawing-room, who has time to converse, who knows that she is listened to, who listens to herself : she is a woman of society, who preserves

the tone of refined conversation ; and in order to smooth down the harshness, her slanders are interrupted by the calm reason and sensible discourse of the amiable Eliante. Molière represents the malice of the world without exaggeration ; but in Sheridan they are rather caricatured than depicted. "Ladies, your servant," says Sir Peter ; "mercy upon me ! the whole set—a character dead at every sentence."<sup>1</sup> In fact, they are ferocious : it is a regular quarry ; they even befoul one another, to deepen the outrage. Mra. Candour remarks : "Yesterday Miss Prim assured me, that Mr. and Mrs. Honey-moon are now become mere man and wife, like the rest of their acquaintance. She likewise hinted, that a certain widow in the next street had got rid of her dropsy, and recovered her shape in a most surprising manner. . . . I was informed, too, that Lord Flimsy caught his wife at a house of no extraordinary fame ; and that Tom Saunter and Sir Harry Idle were to measure swords on a similar occasion."<sup>2</sup> Their animosity is so bitter that they lower themselves to play the part of buffoons. The most elegant person in the room, Lady Teazle, shows her teeth to ape a ridiculous lady, draws her mouth on one side, and makes faces. There is no pause, no softening ; sarcasms fly about like pistol-shots. The author had laid in a stock, he had to use them up. He himself is speaking through the mouth of each of his characters ; he gives them all the same wit, that is his own, his irony, his harshness, his picturesque vigour ; whatever they are, clowns, fops, old maids, no matter, the author's main business is to break out into twenty explosions in a minute :

<sup>1</sup> *The School for Scandal*, ii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* i. 1.

*Mrs. Candour.* Well, I will never join in the ridicule of a friend; so I tell my cousin Ogle, and ye all know what pretensions she has to beauty.

*Crab.* She has the oddest countenance—a collection of features from all the corners of the globe.

*Sir Benjamin.* She has, indeed, an Irish front.

*Crab.* Caledonian locks.

*Sir B.* Dutch nose.

*Crab.* Austrian lips.

*Sir B.* The complexion of a Spaniard.

*Crab.* And teeth *à la Chinoise*.

*Sir B.* In short, her face resembles a *table d'hôte* at Spa, where no two guests are of a nation.

*Crab.* Or a congress at the close of a general war, where every member seems to have a different interest, and the nose and chin are the only parties likely to join issue."<sup>1</sup>

Or again :

"*Crab.* Sad news upon his arrival, to hear how your brother has gone on !

*Joseph Surface.* I hope no busy people have already prejudiced his uncle against him—he may reform.

*Sir Benjamin.* True, he may; for my part, I never thought him so utterly void of principle as people say, and though he has lost all his friends, I am told nobody is better spoken of amongst the Jews.

*Crab.* Foregad, if the old Jewry was a ward, Charles would be an alderman, for he pays as many annuities as the Irish Tontine; and when he is sick, they have prayers for his recovery in all the Synagogues.

*Sir B.* Yet no man lives in greater splendor.—They tell me, when he entertains his friends, he can sit down to dinner with a dozen of his own securities, have a score of tradesmen waiting in the anti-chamber, and an officer behind every guest's chair."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The School for Scandal*, ii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* i. 1.

And again :

"Sir B. Mr. Surface, I did not mean to hurt you, but depend on't, your brother is utterly undone.

Orab. Oh ! undone as ever man was—can't raise a guinea.

Sir B. Everything is sold, I am told, that was moveable.

Orab. Not a moveable left, except some old bottles and some pictures, and they seem to be framed in the wainscot, egad.

Sir B. I am sorry to hear also some bad stories of him.

Orab. Oh ! he has done many mean things, that's certain.

Sir B. But, however, he's your brother.

Orab. Ay ! as he is your brother—we'll tell you more another opportunity." <sup>1</sup>

In this manner has he pointed, multiplied, driven in to the quick the measured epigrams of Molière. And yet is it possible to grow weary of such a well-sustained discharge of malice and witticisms ?

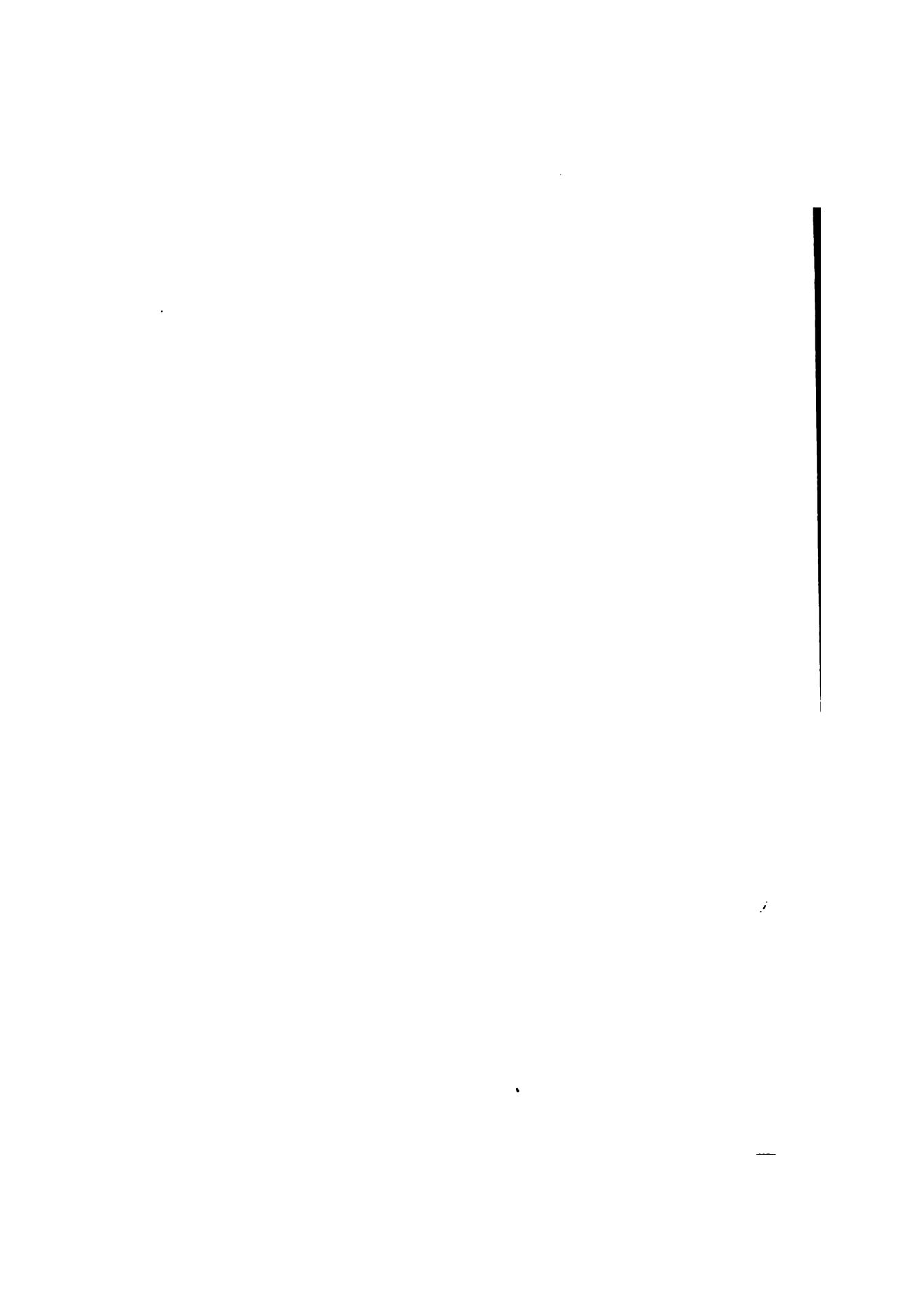
Observe also the change which the hypocrite undergoes under Sheridan's treatment. Doubtless all the grandeur disappears from the part. Joseph Surface does not uphold, like Tartuffe, the interest of the comedy ; he does not possess, like his ancestor, the nature of a cad, the boldness of a man of action, the manners of a beadle, the neck and shoulders of a monk. He is merely selfish and cautious ; if he is engaged in an intrigue, it is rather against his will ; he is only half-hearted in the matter, like a correct young man, well dressed, with a fair income, timorous and fastidious by nature, discreet in manners, and without violent passions ; all about him is soft and polished, he takes his tone from the times, he makes no display of re-

<sup>1</sup> *The School for Scandal*, i. 1.

ligion, though he does of morality; he is a man of measured speech, of lofty sentiments, a disciple of Dr. Johnson or of Rousseau, a dealer in set phrases. There is nothing on which to construct a drama in this commonplace person; and the fine situations which Sheridan takes from *Molière* lose half their force through depending on such pitiful support. But how this insufficiency is covered by the quickness, abundance, naturalness of the incidents! how skill makes up for everything! how it seems capable of supplying everything! even genius! how the spectator laughs to see Joseph caught in his sanctuary like a fox in his hole; obliged to hide the wife, then to conceal the husband; forced to run from the one to the other; busy in hiding the one behind the screen, and the other in his closet; reduced, in casting himself into his own snares, in justifying those whom he wished to ruin, the husband in the eyes of the wife, the nephew in the eyes of the uncle, to ruin the only man whom he wished to justify, namely, the precious and immaculate Joseph Surface; to turn out in the end ridiculous, odious, baffled, confounded, in spite of his adroitness, even by reason of his adroitness, step by step, without quarter or remedy; to sneak off, poor fox, with his tail between his legs, his skin spoiled, amid hootings and laughter! And how, at the same time, side by side with this, the naggings of Sir Peter and his wife, the suppers, songs, the picture sale at the spendthrift's house, weave a comedy in a comedy, and renew the interest by renewing the attention! We cease to think of the meagreness of the characters, as we cease to think of the deviation from truth; we are willingly carried away by the vivacity of

the action, dazzled by the brilliancy of the dialogue ; we are charmed, applaud ; admit that, after all, next to great inventive faculty, animation and wit are the most agreeable gifts in the world : we appreciate them in their season, and find that they also have their place in the literary banquet ; and that if they are not worth as much as the substantial joints, the natural and generous wines of the first course, at least they furnish the dessert.

The dessert over, we must leave the table. After Sheridan, we leave it forthwith. Henceforth comedy languishes, fails ; there is nothing left but farce, such as Townley's *High Life Below Stairs*, the burlesques of George Colman, a tutor, an old maid, countrymen and their dialect; caricature succeeds painting; Punch raises a laugh when the days of Reynolds and Gainsborough are over. There is nowhere in Europe, at the present time, a more barren stage ; the higher classes abandon it to the people. This is because the form of society and of intellect which had called it into being, have disappeared. Vivacity, and the abundance of original conceptions, had peopled the stage of the Renaissance in England,—a surfeit which, unable to display itself in systematic argument, or to express itself in philosophical ideas, found its natural outlet only in mimic action and talking characters. The wants of polished society had nourished the English comedy of the seventeenth century,—a society which, accustomed to the representations of the court and the displays of the world, sought on the stage a copy of its conversation and its drawing-rooms. With the decline of the court and the check of mimic invention, the genuine drama and the genuine comedy disappeared ; they passed from the stage.



*SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS*



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into books. The reason of it is, that people no longer live in public, like the embroidered dukes of Louis XIV. and Charles II., but in their families, or at the writing-table; the novel replaces the theatre at the same time that citizen life replaces the life of the court.

**END OF VOL. II.**



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